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EDWARD WHYMPER • A. F. MUMMERY
J. NORMAN COLLIE • GEORGE LEIGH-MALLORY
GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG • SIR JOHN HUNT

BY
RONALD W. CLARK



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NOTES ON FURTHER BOOKS

EDWARD WHYMPER's great book describing his adventures is his *Scrambles Amongst the Alps in the Years 1860-1869*. *Travels Amongst the Great Andes of the Equator* describes his travels in that range, while his guide-books to Chamonix and Zermatt include much history of the surrounding peaks. The only story of his life is Frank Smythe's *Edward Whymper*.

A. F. MUMMERY wrote only one book dealing with his climbing adventures, *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus*. His life has never been written, but many interesting footnotes to his mountaineering exploits are given in an article by T. S. Blakeney in the May 1955 issue of the *Alpine Journal*.

J. NORMAN COLLIE's mountaineering adventures are described in numerous articles in the *Alpine Journal* and *The Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, as well as in his two books, *Climbing in the Himalaya* and *Climbs and Exploration in the Canadian Rockies*, the latter written in collaboration with Hugh E. M. Stutfield.

GEORGE LEIGH-MALLORY's writings on Everest are almost entirely confined to his contributions to the two

'official' books, describing the 1921 and the 1922 expeditions, *Mount Everest: The Reconnaissance* by Lt.-Col. C. K. Howard-Bury and other members of the expedition, and *The Assault on Mount Everest, 1922* by Brig.-Gen. the Hon. C. G. Bruce and other members of the expedition. His long essay on 'The Mountaineer as Artist' is contained in No. 3 (New Series) of *The Climbers' Club Journal*, published in 1914. The only volume in English dealing with his life is the memoir by David (now Sir David) Pye.

GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG's great climbing achievements are described in his two volumes, *On High Hills*, dealing with his Alpine ascents before the First World War, and *Mountains With a Difference*, the story of his early days in Wales and the climbs after his loss of a leg. Many of his wartime and other experiences are described in *The Grace of Forgetting*. *Mountain Craft* is his great exposition of the principles of mountaineering, while his poems are published not only in *Wind and Hill*, *April and Rain* and *Freedom*, but also in a collected edition.

BRIGADIER SIR JOHN HUNT's story of the Everest expedition is told in his *The Ascent of Everest*, but the stories of his other expeditions are, so far, contained only in the volumes of the *Himalayan Journal* and the Journals of the Climbers' Club and the Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District.

I

EDWARD WHYMPER

MEN have travelled since earliest recorded times through the Alps, that great range stretching in a crescent from the Mediterranean to the high tangled uplands of Eastern Europe. Soldiers from Hannibal to Napoleon have taken their troops across its passes, and generals such as the Russian Suvorov have fought complicated campaigns both above and below the snowline. For more than a thousand years merchants have carried their goods from Northern Europe to the plains of Italy across the most convenient low gaps in the range.

Yet it is only within the last century and a half that men have gone to the Alps for pleasure and have climbed the great peaks; it is for little more than 100 years that they have done so in any numbers. The tale of how they travelled higher and higher above the snowline and eventually began to climb the summits is a story that begins with the offer of a reward, made in 1760 by the Genevese naturalist Horace Benedict de Saussure, to be given to the traveller who should first reach the top of Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in the Alps. It continues with the

wanderings of such men as the Meyer brothers, the Hugi, Louis Agassiz of Neuchatel, and the Scotsman James David Forbes. All of these were scientists who in the course of their work began to travel above the snowline during the early part of the nineteenth century. They were interested in many physical phenomena—in the small amount of oxygen found in the air at high altitudes, the differing temperatures to be recorded at various heights and, above all, in the movement of the glaciers, the wide rivers of ice which ran from the upper snowfields down into the green pastures of the higher Alpine valleys. As the scientists travelled across the glaciers and up the lower peaks in the course of their work, two things happened. First, they began to build up a knowledge of how it was possible to move among the higher mountains with far more safety than had been believed possible. Secondly, they began to find among the mountains an unexpected exhilaration and enjoyment. They talked of these things to their friends, the doctors and lawyers, the clergymen and gentlemen of leisure who packed out the rich colourful canvas of the Victorian scene; and, one by one throughout the 1840's and the 1850's, these men began to explore mountains for pleasure.

The Alpine world in which they moved, and of which Edward Whymper was the immediate inheritor, was a world radically different from that which we know today and through which we can pass, or over which we can fly, with such comparative ease.

The first railway did not come to Switzerland—the country which contains the biggest segment of the Alpine chain—until 1844, and for nearly another twenty years it went nowhere near the mountains. The traveller was set down in the lowlands and continued his journey by horse-drawn diligence. These coaches crossed a few of the main Alpine passes, but they did not follow the ‘dead-end’ side-valleys at whose heads the best climbing centres were so often situated. These had usually to be reached on foot, with baggage carried on mule-back if one’s finances ran to this.

Inns were small and often verminous, and many of the so-called guides were, as Whymper himself once said, ‘pointers-out of paths and large consumers of meat and drink, but little more’. With the exception of a small wooden cabin which was opened on the Grands Mulets on Mont Blanc in 1853, there were no huts above the snowline such as those at which climbers can now sleep and eat before making the ascent of almost any great peak—thus considerably reducing the height that has to be climbed in a single day. When the pioneers wished to sleep high on their mountain, they had to sleep out, using caves or overhanging rocks for shelter and having all their food, drink and blankets carried up by porters from the nearest village.

It was above the snowline, however, that the climbers of the 1850’s and 1860’s met conditions so extremely different from those of today. There were

no reliable maps, and before climbing a mountain the first problem was often to find it. Secondly, and perhaps even more important, there was still an almost superstitious fear of the unknown land of perpetual snow. It was, after all, only in the mid-eighteenth century that Schetzcher, a Swiss traveller and naturalist of some standing, had gravely listed the different kinds of dragons that might be found in the Alps; it was little more than fifty years previously that Swiss peasants and Genevse scientists had alike believed that it would be impossible for a man to survive one night out above the snowline. Whymper, writing of the Matterhorn as he first saw it in the early 1860's, says that, 'There seemed to be a cordon drawn around it, up to which one might go, but no further. Within that invisible line gins and effreets were supposed to exist—the Wandering Jew and the spirits of the damned. The superstitious natives in the surrounding valleys (many of whom firmly believed it to be not only the highest mountain in the Alps, but in the world) spoke of a ruined city on its summit wherein the spirits dwelt; and if you laughed, they gravely shook their heads; told you to look yourself to see the castles and the walls, and warned one against rash approach, lest the infuriate demons from their impregnable heights might hurl down vengeance for one's derision.' The Matterhorn was, of course, an exceptional mountain, but the sense of awe which it inspired remained true of many mountains even *after* they had been climbed.

This was the Alpine scene midway through the nineteenth century. It was peopled very largely by Englishmen. The Swiss, the French, the Italians, and later the Germans also climbed, but during what has become known as the 'Golden Age' of mountaineering from 1854 to 1865 no less than half of the peaks which were climbed for the first time were conquered by British mountaineers, men of all other nationalities accounting for the remaining half.

These British mountaineers were usually well-to-do professional men who spent six or eight weeks each summer in travelling through the Alps and climbing the peaks which most attracted them. There was Alfred Wills, the tall dignified lawyer who later became a well-known judge and whose ascent in 1854 of the Wetterhorn, the fine peak which rises above the village of Grindelwald in the Bernese Oberland, is often considered as marking the beginning of climbing as a popular sport. His ascent was the fifth of the peak and not the first, but it was an exciting adventure, well told two years later in his book *Wanderings Among the Alps*, an account which did much to spread the knowledge of what the Alps had to offer. There was the Rev. Charles Hudson, who served as a chaplain in the Crimea, who was one of the first men to climb major peaks in the Alps without guides, and who in 1855 made the first ascent of the highest peak of Monte Rosa—without their assistance. There was Leslie Stephen, the journalist and author, and the man who was later so

largely responsible for the great *Dictionary of National Biography*. There was John Tyndall, one of the most famous scientists of the day; the three members of the Mathews family of Birmingham; John Ball, the statesman, who had been Under-Secretary for the Colonies in Palmerston's government; civil servants like Reginald Macdonald and A. W. Moore; gentlemen of private means such as Edward Shirley Kennedy and Thomas Woodbine Hinchliff.

All these made first ascents during their summer visits to the Alps; they encouraged and helped to train the really great local guides of the period, and in 1857 they founded the Alpine Club, the first of its kind in the world, a dining club which met in London and at whose dinners the members discussed their Alpine adventures and exchanged information about the new routes they had made.

And, as they travelled through the Alps during the summer of 1860, another young man was seeing the mountains for the first time, a man whose story was to be remembered long after theirs had been forgotten, and who for nearly a century has been the most famous of all British climbers.

His name was Edward Whymper and he was in many ways totally different from the other men who were climbing in the Alps at that time. For one thing, most of them went there during their holidays, and however much they might later become attached to mountaineering they almost all began climbing purely as an adventurous pastime. Whymper, however, first

went to the Alps to work. He was a young artist-engraver, trained as a draughtsman on wood by his father, who carried on business as a book-illustrator in Lambeth. His family was moderately well-off and it was planned that in 1860 Edward, who was then only twenty, should make a long journey on the Continent—one on which he would combine with pleasure such business as meeting his father's clients abroad. Shortly before he left England, the business received an inquiry from William Longman, a gentleman who was a member of the Alpine Club and whose firm had published many of the early books dealing with Alpine exploration. A new volume written by members of the club and containing accounts of their adventures—the second volume of the famous *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*—was to be issued, and Longman required a number of sketches to illustrate it including, in particular, a drawing of the Pelvoux, the fifth-highest peak in the Dauphiné Alps of France, a little-known group well to the south of the main Alpine chain. Would it be possible for Mr. Whympers to carry out this work?

At that time young Whympers had little interest in the Alps. He had once scrambled with his brother on the chalk cliffs of Beachy Head but that was the limit of his 'mountaineering'. However, he had for years been ambitious to visit the Arctic; and, since snow and ice were found in the Alps as well as in the Arctic, he seized the opportunity with both hands. For might he not, with the experience gained in Switzerland and

France, be able to join some future Arctic expedition? That journey in the summer of 1860 was to alter the young Whymper's whole life and to lead to his transformation into a national figure.

What sort of a man was it, one may ask, who crossed the Channel from Newhaven on 23 July at the start of his two-month tour of the Alps?

Edward Whymper was a tall, powerfully built fellow, already a tremendous walker. He was earnest, without any great sense of humour, brusque and determined. His background was rather unlike that of most other young men who were climbing in the Alps at that time. To start with, he had not been to a university; he was a craftsman rather than a professional man—and a century ago the social difference was more deeply drawn than it is today; and, although a member of a successful family business, he had to watch his finances rather more closely than did most of the men who were later to become his climbing companions. All these things combined to make him not better or worse than the men with whom he was to be drawn into contact by his Alpine experiences. They made him slightly different.

Two things, however, soon combined to make Edward Whymper the envy of his contemporaries. In the first place he was a fine artist, a draughtsman who captured the 'feel' of action in the mountains as none had done before and few have done since. Secondly, he had that peculiar combination of natural climbing ability, imagination, and determination which was to

make him the most successful, and one of the best, mountaineers of his generation.

On that first visit to the Alps, Whymper did little serious climbing. He visited the Bernese Oberland and Zermatt in Switzerland, Courmayeur in Italy, and Chamonix in France, and at the latter place found to his annoyance that the Mer de Glace, the huge glacier which descends from the upper snowfields of Mont Blanc, was closed to all tourists owing to a visit by the Emperor Napoleon and his wife. Whymper outwitted the guards and by a piece of what was probably dangerous scrambling managed to get a view of the Imperial party. Then he went south to the Dauphiné to make his sketches of the Pelvoux, meeting there a French climber, Jean Reynaud, who a few days earlier had made an unsuccessful attempt to climb the mountain with three Englishmen.

In the early autumn of 1860 Whymper delivered his mountain sketches. They were extremely good, and for the next forty years—until, in fact, photography replaced the artist for the type of work in which he specialized—he was to draw many hundreds of comparable pictures which were to illustrate a vast number of books.

Whymper went back to the Alps in 1861, however, not only to draw but to climb. He took his sketch-book with him, and at various exciting moments throughout his Alpine career there are records of him taking out his pad and spending the odd few minutes sketching the mountains while the other

members of the party were eating and drinking. But he went back to the Alps for more than sketching. For that first year he had, he later wrote, been 'introduced to some of the great peaks, and acquired the passion for mountain-scrambling'.

During the campaigns on which he embarked from 1861 onwards, and in which he was so outstandingly successful, Whymper looked at mountaineering in a way rather different from our own attitude today and slightly different from that of his contemporaries. He regarded the mountains as a personal challenge to man's ability to conquer the physical world. He wanted to get to the top—in those days there was no question of finding more exciting and more difficult ways up mountains which had already been climbed; the problem was simply one of getting there by the simplest way. And, when it came to succeeding, Whymper, and many of his contemporaries, used methods which some years afterwards were considered almost unsporting. He thought nothing of driving metal stakes into the rock if he could thus make a passage more simple; and he devised a 'claw', as he called it, which was a double-pronged affair, attached to a length of rope through a hole where the two hooks met. At a difficult place Whymper would hurl up the 'claw' so that it caught securely on the rock, and then use the rope as a handhold over the holdless place—a method which would now be frowned upon by most British mountaineers.

In 1861, the Pelvoux, a broad and imposing but not

unduly difficult mountain, had been ascended only once—by a Frenchman, Captain Durand, in 1828—and Whympcr was determined to make the first English ascent. In the Dauphiné he met Reynaud, his acquaintance of the previous year, and Reginald Macdonald, then a clerk in the Colonial Office. They climbed their peak without too much difficulty—the main trouble being to identify it, for there were no reliable maps. Then, after visiting the engineering works where hundreds of men were building the Mont Cenis tunnel, Whympcr came down to Chatillon at the entrance of the Val Tournanche.

When Whympcr set out on his Alpine travels in 1861 there were two great mountains in particular which had not only inspired mountaineers by their form but had persistently repulsed them. One was the Weiss horn, the shapely snow-pyramid in the Pennine Alps which many men felt was the most beautiful mountain in the whole of the range. The second was the Matterhorn, the dramatic rock pyramid which rises on the frontier between Switzerland and Italy.

The idea of climbing these two peaks had intrigued Whympcr before he had left England, and it is typical of his whole attitude to mountaineering that when, in Chatillon, he heard that Professor Tyndall had succeeded in making the ascent of the first, his 'interest in the Weiss horn abated', as he says himself.

Whympcr therefore went on to Breuil, the little Italian hamlet lying high up almost under the shadow

of the Matterhorn, hiring a local guide *en route* and preparing for the first round in his battle with this tremendous mountain.

No peak in the Alps has quite the same dramatic impact as the Matterhorn, and it is significant that wherever climbers have gone they have used its name as a measure of the inaccessible—witness Stedtind, ‘the Matterhorn of Norway’, Ushba, ‘the Matterhorn of the Caucasus’, and the Mustagh Tower whose immense soaring rock-walls have earned it the title of ‘the Matterhorn of the Karakoram’.

The Matterhorn consists, very roughly, of a gigantic rock pyramid which rises between the Italian valley of Valtournanche with the hamlet of Breuil at its head, and the Swiss valley in which stands the village of Zermatt. The two longer ridges of the mountain run north-east to Zermatt and south-west to Breuil, and two shorter and steeper ridges, the Zmutt and the Furggen, run roughly at right angles to these. As early as 1857, Italians from Valtournanche had gone as far up the Italian ridge as they could. British climbers had tackled both sides—first the three Parker brothers from Zermatt, then Vaughan Hawkins and Professor Tyndall from the Italian side. The difficulty of the rocks stopped all parties, while the British found that few of their regular Swiss guides would even think of tackling the mountain, so great was its reputation of inaccessibility.

Whymper had to deal with the same problem. He succeeded in hiring a second-rate Swiss from a party

of Englishmen, but could find no one else to accompany him. A typical reaction came from one famous guide who asked 200 francs (about £20) to accompany him—an exorbitant figure that he knew would be refused. Everyone told Whympers that there was only one person of any use at all—Jean-Antoine Carrel.

Here there enters into the story of the Matterhorn the one man who was as determined as Whympers to be first on the top of the mountain. Carrel was a peasant of the Valtournanche, born thirty-two years previously, almost in the shadow of the Matterhorn. He had become a stonemason, had served in the army, and had returned to his native valley four years before Whympers's visit. With local companions he had gone as high on the mountain as he could. He had gone up again, been beaten again, yet had vowed more than once that he would stand on the summit before any other man—moreover, that he would climb the mountain from the Italian and not from the Swiss side, and thus bring fame and fortune to his fellow-villagers.

Whympers sought out Carrel and found him a stocky but well-built man, dark-haired, of rough countenance, a man who looked like the stage version of a Sicilian bandit. Carrel was willing to go with Whympers—but on condition that the Englishman took a second Italian. Sparks flew between Whympers and Carrel, who insisted that the third man was necessary, and Whympers went off alone, later

camping high up on the mountain with his one, poor, guide.

That night, as the two of them sat by their camp-fire two shadows began to pass just outside the glow from the blazing wood. Whymper called to them—and found the men to be Carrel and his uncle. When challenged by Whymper, they claimed that *they* did not need a third man—and passed up onwards into the darkness so that the following morning, when dawn came, Whymper knew that the two Italians already had a lead over him of many hundred feet.

That brush of words in the camp-light probably settled things for Whymper. Now, he felt, he *had* to climb the Matterhorn before the Italians; and, from that day onwards, that one idea began to dominate his life.

In the morning he set off up the great south-west ridge of the mountain with his guide. Far above him, out of sight, were Carrel and his companion.

Higher and higher went Whymper and his companion, climbing carefully—‘there was no more sauntering with hands in the pocket’, says Whymper, ‘each step had to be earned by downright climbing’—until they were looking out over a vast sea of mountains. In one direction lay the great mass of Monte Rosa, in another the distant peaks of the Graian Alps, while far away, shimmering in the sun, was the pointed peak of the Viso, almost a hundred miles distant.

They struggled on upwards until, unexpectedly,

they were halted by 'the Chimney', a steep slab of rock cooped in by parallel walls; the guide said the place was impossible. Whympers 'chimney'd up' between the walls, back and hands on one side, feet on the other, and then called on the guide to follow him. Still the man refused, and Whympers, fuming at the situation, was forced to retreat. He had reached a height of about 12,650 ft. Carrel had been about 600 ft. higher, he learned later; then Carrel, too, had been forced to descend.

The following year, 1862, Whympers made no fewer than four attempts to climb the Matterhorn, having on the third of these a 200-ft. fall and an escape from death narrow enough to have lessened most men's enthusiasm for the mountain.

First of all he tried with his friend Macdonald, the man with whom he had made the first English ascent of the Pelvoux, and two Swiss guides. They were turned back by bad weather, went down to Breuil—and found Carrel waiting for them. Yes, he was prepared to try the mountain with them, as long as his friend Pession came.

This time the Englishmen agreed to take Carrel's second man. They camped higher than before, passed the Chimney successfully—and were then held up, without the slightest warning, by Carrel's assistant suddenly saying that he was ill and would go no farther. And without Pession, Carrel said *he* would go no farther. Again Whympers was forced down, not by his own inability but by the reluctance of his

guides. Macdonald had to return home and so, once more, Whymper found himself alone, unable to find the companions needed to make any practicable attempt on the mountain. Desperate, he crossed the frontier to Zermatt and during a week of storm tried to induce some guide to accompany him into Italy and make an attempt on the Matterhorn. Everyone refused. Eventually, seeing that the position was hopeless, he return to Breuil—only to find that Carrel was by now—so he said—too busy at his everyday work to go out on the mountains.

So Whymper, climbing alone this time, set off up the mountain to inspect the tent which he had left rolled up and pegged down on a little platform, some 12,550 ft. up on the Italian ridge. He reached it without difficulty, pitched the tent, cooked a meal, and sat at the tent-door as the stars came out and the silence was broken by the isolated sounds of the birds in the neighbouring cliffs. Then the moon rose. 'Something in the south hung like a great glow-worm in the air; it was too large for a star, and too steady for a meteor; and it was long', Whymper wrote later, 'before I could realize the scarcely credible fact that it was the moonlight glittering on the great snow-slope on the north side of Monte Viso, at a distance, as the crow flies, of ninety-eight miles.'

The following morning he set off up the Italian ridge alone carrying an axe—a naval boarding axe and not an ice-axe such as would be used today—the 'claw', and a device, as he calls it, consisting of a

wrought-iron ring attached to one end of a length of rope. In descent, a belaying loop could be made by taking the rope through the ring, and passing the loop so formed round a projecting rock. After sliding down the rope, Whympers would release the belay by pulling down the ring by means of a piece of cord which was attached to it.

Thus equipped he went higher and higher up the ridge, dealing with the individual rock problems as they came, passing the Chimney and climbing some hundreds of feet above it—higher, he soon realized, than Carrel had ever been. Then the difficulties increased, much time was lost in picking the right route, and finally he was forced to turn back. But he was almost on a level with the top of the Dent d'Herens, at a height of about 13,400 ft. and only some 1,400 ft. below the summit.

He climbed down cautiously, passed the tent platform late in the afternoon and, as he says, 'thought myself as good as at Breuil'.

Then, passing a rock corner on hard ice, he slipped and fell. He fell a dozen feet without hitting anything, ricocheted off into space and in seven or eight gigantic bounds, striking rocks, then snow, then rocks again, dropped some 200 ft. Then he realized that his clothes had caught on the rocks—and held him within a few feet of an 800-ft. drop on to the glacier below.

Plastering snow on to the cuts on his head from which blood was spurting, he fainted away. When he

came to, dusk was falling but he staggered on down—covering most of the 4,900 ft. to Breuil in the dark!

Carrel, hearing of the accident, came up to offer his services—a gesture from one brave man to another. Whymper, Jean-Antoine, a relative named Caesar, and a little hunchback porter named Luc Meynet, set off up the mountain for another attempt. And, at the first turn of bad weather, Carrel insisted on descending—not because he feared the weather but because, it is difficult not to assume, he was eager to seize any chance to prevent an Englishman from getting to the top first.

It must have seemed to Whymper that year that he was doomed *not* to climb the Matterhorn. After waiting for better weather at the foot of the mountain, he found first that the Carrels had gone off marmot-hunting and could not be hired—thus forcing him to make yet another desperate attempt to climb the mountain with Luc Meynet alone; then, on his return, that Carrel had been hired by Professor Tyndall, the one Englishman who Whymper feared might very well succeed where he had failed.

Whymper need not have worried. The proud Carrel had been hired by Tyndall as a porter and when, high on the mountain, only he could have stepped into the breach and led the way, he replied to all Tyndall's entreaties: 'Ask your guides; we are only porters.'

Whymper returned to England discomfited and, it almost seems, with some of his Matterhorn ambitions quenched. The following year he made but one

attempt on the mountain, an attempt with Carrel which was frustrated by bad weather, returned to England, read a paper to the Alpine Club on camping out in which he described the special mountain tent he had designed, and which is still called after him, and began to plan a campaign for the summer of 1864.

Whymper was now at the height of his power. He was only twenty-four, but he had gained a considerable reputation in mountaineering circles by his exploits on the Matterhorn, and he had also made a number of other ascents in the Alps which helped to prove his exceptional ability. With him on the 1864 holiday went two other leading climbers, A. W. Moore, a civil servant, and Horace Walker, a Liverpool business man. In the Alps they were joined by two of the finest guides of the day, Michel Croz from Chamonix and the great Christian Almer from Grindelwald in the Bernese Oberland.

Whymper's objective this year was the Dauphiné, the little-known area of the French Alps where he had, so to speak, climbed into fame by his ascent of the Pelvoux a few years earlier. In those days the Dauphiné had a reputation for bad inns, worse communications, and a general backwardness which it was alleged contrasted unfavourably with the more prosperous and civilized Alpine areas of Switzerland. There seems to have been something in this attitude, and it is certainly true that in 1864 the Dauphiné had a greater number of interesting, exciting, unclimbed peaks than any other area of the Alps.

Whymper and his friends gathered on the outskirts of the Dauphiné, made a new pass between two of the three Aiguilles d'Arves, and continued down to La Grave, the little village which rests in the shadow of the great rock peak of the Meije. From La Grave they set out on a journey which was immensely successful even for those days. They first crossed the huge sabre-gash of the Brèche de la Meije, the high col which bounds one side of the Meije itself, and descended to the little hamlet of La Bérarde. From here they made the second crossing of the Col des Ecrins and then the first ascent of the Ecrins itself, the highest peak in the whole of the Dauphiné. They then made the first passage of another important local pass, the Col de la Pilatte, and finally arrived at Chamonix.

This was a formidable list of successes but Whymper, after his arrival at Chamonix, continued his almost unbelievable exploits—making in less than a fortnight first ascents of Mont Dolent, the Aiguille de la Trélatête and the Aiguille d'Argentière, all of them difficult mountains judged by the standards of the time, and the first crossings of the Col de Triolet and the Moming Pass, the latter bringing him down to Zermatt. Carried out over a period of three or four years, and made by a more mature man, these ascents would have been remarkable; made by a twenty-four-year-old in a matter of days, they confirmed Whymper's position as the most determined and adventurous of contemporary climbers.

Now, surely, he must have felt, the Matterhorn would finally succumb to him. Together with a friend, Anthony Adams-Reilly, he planned another attempt—and before it could be begun, was called home on urgent business. ‘Our career in 1864’, he wrote later, ‘had been one of unbroken success, but the great ascent upon which I had set my heart was not attempted, and, until it was accomplished, I was unsatisfied.’

The following year, he decided, there should be no mistake. Whymper began his season in a manner that was by this time quite in character. He planned his holiday so that he should, as he later explained, test himself out over unknown country; and in carrying out his plans, he again reaped a whole bagful of first ascents—of the Grand Cornier, the lower summit of the Grandes Jorasses, and the Aiguille Verte. He made an unsuccessful attempt on the south-east face of the Matterhorn with Swiss guides—an attempt which brought from Christian Almer the complaint: ‘Why don’t you try some mountain that *can* be climbed?’—and finally crossed over the Théodule Pass into Italy for another attack on the mountain with Carrel.

He engaged Carrel, started gathering provisions for the attempt, and then received a message that a young Englishman farther down the Val Tournanche was ill. Whymper rose to the occasion. When he had lain recuperating from his fall on the Matterhorn he had vowed that if an Englishman in the

valley were ill 'he should not feel so solitary as I did'.

Whymper found his Englishman, the young Rev. Girdlestone, and after fetching him medicine, returned to Breuil.

On that double journey down and up the valley, he learned disturbing news—that on the day following his planned attempt with Carrel the Italian was engaged to another party—'a family of distinction' as Carrel described it. It might only be a party of sight-seeing Italians, but if 10 July, the day arranged for his attempt, turned out to be bad and the attempt had to be postponed—well, once again, he would be stranded at the foot of the Matterhorn without guides. Carrel would be engaged elsewhere, he had dismissed his two Swiss men who had crossed back to Zermatt, and he knew that no one in Breuil would tackle the Matterhorn unless Carrel was one of the party.

The weather *was* bad. Whymper cursed his luck, hung about the little Mont Cervin Hotel, 6,600 ft. up on the pastures around Breuil, greeted Girdlestone who had recovered and had walked up to Breuil in the evening, and went to bed early.

He was awakened early on the morning of 11 July by Girdlestone who came into his room to tell him the news. Whymper, rather sleepily one may imagine, asked him what news, and Girdlestone, not knowing the significance of his story, explained how a large party of guides had left for the Matterhorn a short

while ago; how they carried a mule-load of provisions; and how it seemed to him as though a major attempt on the mountain had started.

Whymper dressed hurriedly and a few moments later was standing at the door of the little inn, looking through his field-glasses at the distant winding caravan of men crossing the lower slopes of the mountain.

He turned to Favre, the Italian inn-keeper, and asked who the leader of the party was. 'Carrel' was the reply.

Then, bit by bit, Whymper learned the story. How more than a year previously Carrel had been interviewed by Quintino Sella, the founder of the Italian Alpine Club; how he had agreed to hold himself ready for an attempt on the Matterhorn with Felice Giordano, a young Italian engineer. How plans for the ascent had been going on, during the three previous days, under Whymper's unsuspecting eyes.

Little wonder that Whymper, writing later, bitterly described how he felt 'bamboozled and humbugged'. Of all British climbers, he was probably the most dangerous to arouse in such a way. 'Hard', 'stern', 'determined'—these are the words that his contemporaries used of him; they might well have added the word 'ruthless'.

He asked for his kit to be packed, explained to Favre that he was leaving for Zermatt, and called for porters to help carry his baggage, his ropes, and his camping equipment. Favre explained that all the available men were on the mountain, a fact that

Whymper confirmed as he went unsuccessfully round the chalets of the little hamlet trying to get men.

Yet he still had his kit packed—just in case. Then he went out on to the grass in front of the hotel to join Girdlestone, waiting, it must have seemed, for something to turn up.

Something did turn up. Shortly before midday a group of men emerged from the mists still hanging over the Théodule Pass and started down the path to Breuil. Two of them were ahead of the others and as they came nearer Whymper recognized one as young Taugwalder, the son of old Peter Taugwalder, one of the most experienced of the Zermatt men. With him was a tall young fellow, obviously an Englishman by the cut of his clothes.

The party arrived, Whymper waited for the men to settle themselves into the hotel, and then introduced himself to the young Englishman as the latter came outside again.

The new-comer was none other than Lord Francis Douglas, an audacious mountaineer, experienced in spite of his mere nineteen years, of whose exploits Whymper had heard with mixed admiration and envy. Whymper explained the position. Douglas commented that his guide's father, 'old' Peter Taugwalder back in Zermatt, had himself recently reconnoitred the Matterhorn and believed that an ascent might well be made from the Swiss side.

There was only one possible outcome. They conferred, and then Whymper told Favre that they

would all be going over to Zermatt early the following day.

Soon after nine the next morning they left Breuil—Whymper, Douglas, Girdlestone, the young Taugwalder, and an extra man whom Favre had finally found. Beyond the summit of the Théodule they struck off left from the Zermatt path towards the Schwarzsee, the little lake that lies in the lee of the Matterhorn's north-east ridge. Here, by the stone chapel, they off-loaded the rolled blankets, the coils of rope, the tent, and the rest of Whymper's paraphernalia. Of rope alone they dumped nearly 600 ft.—200 ft. of Buckingham's Manilla, 150 ft. of a thicker but more unwieldy variety, and about 200 ft. of 'line' or light-weight rope.

From the Schwarzsee they strolled down to Zermatt and were hardly inside the doors before they were greeted by Alexander Seiler, plump, courteous and smiling, the man who had built up the hotel during the preceding decade as the 'headquarters' of British climbers in Switzerland.

Douglas and Whymper dumped the little kit that they had retained, then hurried along to tell old Peter of their plans. That done, they strolled back to the hotel. There, sitting on the wall outside the building, was Michel Croz. The client for whom he had left Whymper only a short while ago had fallen ill, and he had been engaged by the Rev. Charles Hudson, one of the few British climbers whose skill was the equal of Whymper's.

Then, just in what way is not known, it came out that Hudson was to try the Matterhorn the following day.

Whymper and Douglas went into dinner deeply thoughtful, watched Hudson come in with a younger man and sit down, then retired after their meal to discuss what should be done.

The details of their conversations, as of many others that took place during the fateful interval between Whymper's departure from Breuil and the conclusion of the Matterhorn story, are unfortunately lacking.

What is known is that when Hudson came out from dinner he was tackled by Whymper; that the two men decided to combine parties in a joint attempt to climb the Matterhorn the following day; and that when Whymper asked, with raised eyebrows one may imagine, whether Hudson's companion was qualified for the difficult work in hand, Hudson himself vouched for the ability of the young man—Douglas Hadow, an exceptional walker but, as it turned out, an inexperienced mountaineer.

So the thing was settled, and at 5.30 the following morning they set out, Whymper, Hudson, Lord Francis Douglas, Hadow, Michel Croz, 'old' Peter Taugwalder and two of his sons.

At the Schwarzsee they collected Whymper's equipment and added it to the loads that they already carried. They then began to tackle the lower reaches of the north-east ridge, finding it far easier than they

had expected. They did not put on the rope. One by one they probably began to realize how much tradition had played in their belief that the north-east ridge was really steep. Now they found that its lower half, at least, presented no major problems.

Everyone realized that it would not be possible to reach the summit that day and that a good tent-site had to be found. Just before midday they reached a horizontal platform at a height of about 11,000 ft.; it looked an ideal place, and they all took off their loads.

While Croz and one of old Taugwalder's sons went off to reconnoitre, the rest of the party set up camp. For an hour or so the men on the tent platform heard, ever more distantly, and high above them, the occasional clatter of a stone, the vague sound of a voice. Then, late in the afternoon, Croz and the young Taugwalder returned. 'We could have gone to the summit', they said. Even Croz, experienced as he was, seemed optimistic.

Throughout the early evening they idled away the time, Whympers sketching, other members of the party looking for rock specimens or for flowers. As the sun went down Hudson brewed tea and Whympers made coffee, using the camp-fire the men had built from the brushwood they had carried up. After a final toddy they crept into their blanket-bags and from their sacks shouted to one another while Croz and the Taugwalders rivalled one another with their local songs.

Soon after it was light the following morning they rose. It was difficult to divide out the food and it was arranged that one of the younger Taugwalders should return to Zermatt. Then a guide began to take up a tent-pole, explaining that it would be useful for a flag-pole on the summit. Whymper tried to stop him—unsuccessfully—feeling that it was tempting Providence.

The party roped and started up slightly to the left of the north-east ridge itself. They moved at will almost everywhere, much to their surprise. In the first two hours they climbed 2,000 ft. and then halted for a second breakfast, high up on the mountain, looking across to the other great peaks of the Pennine Alps, still and silent in the early morning air.

They went on for another hour then, at about 14,000 ft., the face suddenly steepened and forced them on to the ridge itself and then yet farther over to the right, on to the true northern face of the mountain.

‘Now’, muttered Croz, ‘for something different.’

He took the lead, followed by Whymper, Hudson, and then the other four. At places the face was covered with patches of ice where snow had thawed out and then frozen again. The place was not really difficult but it was very exposed, for below them the face steepened and curled over into the great precipices that fell without a break to the Matterhorn Glacier some 4,000 ft. below.

Croz led out right, then up, and then back to the left. He turned an awkward corner and was then on

the ridge again. Whymper followed him and shouted back to the others. All that remained between him and the summit of the Matterhorn was an easy snow slope!

The rest of the party gathered up to Croz and Whymper. Then they went for the summit, Croz and Whymper unroping and dashing on ahead according to Whymper's account. It seems likely that Hudson did the same.

The summit ridge was about 100 yards long, and as Whymper reached it he feared for one awful moment that he might see on the snow the imprints of the Italians. The snow was untouched. Always cautious about such things, he hurried along the ridge-pole of the peak. No one had been there before him. Then he saw, far below, small dots whose faces were scarcely distinguishable, the members of the Italian party. His rivals were still some 1,250 ft. below. Edward Whymper had at last conquered the Matterhorn; more important still, he had been the first on the summit.

They tried to make the Italians hear them, prising up rocks and sending them crashing down over the precipices—not towards the Italians, of course, but so that the noise would be heard. Carrel later said that he recognized one thing as he looked up—Whymper's whitish trousers—and knew that his rival had defeated him. The Italians, discouraged, turned back.

On the summit, Whymper and the rest of the party sat down, unroped, then unslung their haversacks and, as they celebrated their victory with food and

drink, admired the tremendous view spread out around them. The Maritime Alps, 130 miles away, were clearly visible. So was the Dauphiné, the scene of Whymper's earlier triumphs. To the west, the peak of Mont Blanc glowed in the sunshine while to the north, across the huge trough of the Rhone Valley, there rose the peaks of the Bernese Oberland.

Whymper sketched. Hudson, one may imagine, pointed out the peaks to his young friend Hadow, and the guides set about the business of building a stone cairn. The tent-pole was needed after all, and as they sought for a flag Croz stripped off the blue blouse of the Savoyard peasant which he habitually wore over his shirt and trousers, and attached it to the pole.

They were on the top for an hour.

Then they roped up for the descent. Croz would go first in order to make sure of picking the best route. Hadow would follow him on the rope and Hudson—'almost as good as a guide' as he had been described—would go next, able to hold Hadow on a short rope if necessary. Behind him would come Lord Francis Douglas. Next, as sheet-anchor to the previous four, would come old Peter Taugwalder. Whymper and the young Taugwalder would bring up the rear.

As they were about to set off, Whymper remembered that they had not followed the custom of the time—written their names on a sheet of paper, stuck the paper in a bottle, and put the bottle in the cairn. He stayed behind to do so, young Peter Taugwalder

by his side, as the others started down towards Zermatt.

Whymper took one last look round the summit, hearing the voices of his companions coming up through the still air, the occasional word of advice or caution, the chink of metal ferrule or blade of ice-axe catching on rock, the rasping scrape of boot-nail. Then he set off down with the young guide.

They went faster than the five men below them, and caught them up in about a quarter of an hour. Whymper found himself close to old Peter Taugwalder, the last man on the rope below, as the leading members of the party began to negotiate the difficult portion of the north face.

Even when descending, the place was not difficult for men of Whymper's or Hudson's calibre, but it was impressive because of the great void below.

It was when they came to the top of a particularly tricky section that Douglas looked back at Whymper and suggested that he and young Peter might tie on to old Peter Taugwalder. While the party waited, Whymper came down to old Peter and handed him the spare coils of the rope that already linked him to the young Taugwalder. Old Peter tied on.

They moved on down for another ten minutes or so, Croz in the lead turning round at almost every step to help guide Hadow's feet in to the best steps. At one point, where the position was more than usually difficult, he laid down his axe, faced in towards the cliff, and guided Hadow's feet once again.

Croz then reached down, picked up his axe, and turned to take the next step. As he did so, some nerve or muscle in Hadow's legs flickered; for a moment the tension relaxed, the pressure between the worn nails of his shoes and the rocks decreased. His feet shot forward, striking Croz in the small of the back.

Croz shouted in surprise as he fell head forwards and dragged down the younger man. Hudson, as he turned to find some belay, was pulled from his holds. A fraction of a second later the slack rope between Hudson and Lord Francis Douglas snapped taut and Douglas too was tugged from his steps. Old Taugwalder, helped not only by time but by instinct, had twisted himself in his steps and grasped the best available holds as the rope twanged tight behind him with a sound that Whymper, only a few yards away, was to remember for more than a quarter of a century.

The rope between Douglas and old Taugwalder broke in mid-air.

The four leading men, sliding down on their backs, ineffectively clawing at the rocks with their fingertips, dropped down the slope with ever-increasing speed amid a clatter of falling stones.

'Are you all right, father?' screamed the younger Taugwalder, prevented by the rocks, as was Whymper, from seeing in detail what had happened.

Before old Peter could reply the four men below had slipped one by one over the lip of the slope, over and out into space. Behind them went the diminishing clatter of small and yet smaller stones. Then there

was nothing but silence and three men standing in their steps and grasping whatever holds they could.

For half an hour none of them moved.

Then the Taugwalders began chattering incoherently. The older man, knowing that the Chamoniards had great faith in Croz, continually muttered, 'What will Chamonix say?' Whympers kept his head.

Finally, old Peter belayed himself properly and the other two men climbed down to join him.

'Let me look at the rope,' said Whympers, nodding to the broken end still hanging from Taugwalder's waist.

The older man handed it across to Whympers who let out a cry of astonishment as he took it. The 'rope' was in fact 'line', about a centimetre in diameter, the weakest of the three kinds which the party had carried. Taugwalder untied the rope from his waist and handed it over; Whympers put it in his haversack. 'Now', he said, and motioned down the slope.

For nearly two hours, Whympers nursed the party down. Both the Taugwalders were still trembling, unsteady in their steps, and almost unable to secure the short fixed ropes which they at times placed to help themselves.

At about six in the evening they halted on the ridge and looked across the north face in the hope of seeing some sign of their comrades. There was none. They were about to move on down when one of the Taugwalders suddenly pointed with shaking arm towards

the Lyskamm, the great peak rising from the Monte Rosa group to the south-east.

There, forming high in the sky, pale, ghostly, inexplicable, was a mighty arch, an arch not of light but of shadow. Then, more unearthly still, there formed within the arch two great crucifixes.

The two Taugwalders crossed themselves repeatedly. At first even Whymper was awed. But Whymper was not the man to be awed for long by anything. He moved his position, then his arms, thinking that the signs in the sky would move. They did not do so. Slowly, at last, they faded. Some minutes later, as the three men prepared to move off, the two Taugwalders came up to Whymper, speaking in their broken patois. Then young Peter tried to explain in French. Their employer, Douglas, had been killed; they would not get paid.

Whymper said that he himself would pay them. Again the two men broke into patois; again young Peter tried his French. This time, Whymper imagined, they suggested that he should *not* pay them. Then, what with the notoriety, and the pity—well, they would gain from it all.

Whymper, already overwrought, turned without a word and began to race the two men down the ridge, but when dusk fell at about 8.30 they were still on the rocks. At 9.30, Whymper decided that they had had enough. They settled down on a slab of rock at about 13,000 ft., Whymper a little apart. It began to get light soon after three and he started the men down.

It was just 10.30 on the morning of Saturday, 15 July when Whympers and the two Taugwalders finally arrived in the village street of Zermatt. Whympers pushed through the crowd that gathered round them as they went into the Monte Rosa Hotel to be met by Seiler.

In silence Seiler followed Whympers up to his room. Then Whympers turned to him; 'The Taugwalders and I have returned', he said.

Thus the news of the great Matterhorn disaster first became known. It was a disaster that had great repercussions, but before dealing with these it is necessary to explain what happened to Whympers during the following few days.

To start with, guides were mustered to search for the bodies. They found them that Saturday, lying under the lee of the great north face, but it was by that time late in the day and it was decided that they could not then be reached. On the following day Whympers led a party which reached the shattered remains—all except those of Lord Francis Douglas, whose body was never recovered. They were buried where they lay, although the authorities later decreed that they should be moved and buried in Zermatt churchyard.

On the following Friday, the local authorities held an inquiry into the accident, an inquiry at which both Whympers and the Taugwalders gave evidence. Then Whympers left for England, passed through Interlaken and, reading the papers in the library there, realized

for the first time the sensation that the accident had created throughout Europe. Then, and only then, did he finally agree to give a detailed account of the accident, an account contained in a long letter to *The Times*.

The stir that the accident created was due to a number of factors. A century ago, human life was valued far more than is it today, and the loss of four men on a mountain was an event which struck at the human conscience—'Is it life, is it duty, is it common sense?' *The Times* asked in a leading article that dealt with the propriety of mountaineering at all. There was the rivalry between the British and the Italian parties. There was the fact that one of the victims had been a 'milord'. There was the long-drawn-out and dramatic struggle with the mountain over the previous five years, and there was its dramatic form which, alone, made it a challenge. And there was, perhaps, inevitably, the suggestion that there had been some kind of foul play on the mountain. The most usual form of this suggestion was that Taugwalder had 'cut the rope'—a nonsensical suggestion for there would have been no time to do so, while the rope, according to an eyewitness who saw it the day after the accident, had in fact been broken and not cut. There was also the suggestion that Taugwalder had deliberately chosen the weakest rope with which to link himself to the four leading members of the party, thereby providing a 'safety-valve' which would isolate him from the leading men in the event of an accident.

At the inquiry, a number of questions specially framed by Whymper and designed to give the guide the opportunity of explaining how the accident of roping had taken place were put to old Taugwalder. The report of the inquiry—whose simple verdict was that no one was to blame for the accident—was not published for more than half a century, however, and for years old Taugwalder suffered from an unproven suspicion.

The answer to this 'riddle' of the Matterhorn accident is possibly a very simple one. The use of the rope was then relatively new, and ropes themselves were still regarded by some of the older guides with a certain amount of suspicion. To men of Taugwalder's generation a rope was a rope and nothing more, and whether it was thick or thin, new or old, was relatively unimportant. Yet even without this unpleasant query, the Matterhorn accident would still have caused a sensation and Whymper, once he arrived back in England, found himself a public figure, the one English survivor from the most sensational of all mountaineering accidents.

The Matterhorn disaster ended the most active stage of his life as a mountaineer. He went to the Alps the following year, it is true, but merely to investigate the structure of glaciers. He went to the Alps more than once in later years and he even climbed the Matterhorn again—this time with Jean-Antoine Carrel as his guide—but these were merely isolated exploits. He climbed in other ranges, but it was

climbing very different and less desperate from that in which he had indulged during the great years before the Matterhorn disaster.

Just *why* Whymper gave up his active Alpine climbing is not clear even today. For years, his contemporaries naturally thought it was his reaction to the sight of his four companions sliding to destruction which he carried with him until he died. Later, however, it seemed that he had not, after all, been affected by the disaster as much as men had imagined and that he might well have given up this kind of mountaineering just because, as it was later revealed he had confided to Girdlestone on the grass outside the Breuil hotel, he saw no reason in climbing when there were 'no more *new* great mountains to be climbed'.

Even though he gave up the kind of mountaineering which had previously filled so much of his life, Whymper was now famous, a figure at whom men looked over their shoulder to gaze at in the street. He fulfilled his boyhood ambition of going to Greenland, and when the Mont Cenis Tunnel was opened in 1869—the first railway tunnel through the Alps—Whymper was one of the distinguished guests who made the first journey from France to Italy under the Alps.

And, in 1871, there came the *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*. This book, possibly the greatest single chronicle of mountain adventure that has ever been written, was the record of Whymper's climbs and adventures

from his first visit to the Alps to the time of the Matterhorn disaster, an event which it described in detail—the substance of the crucial portions being substantially the same as those contained in Whymper's letter to *The Times*.

The *Scrambles* was an astonishing book, a book from which there still comes the thunder of the falling rocks and the voices of the old guides speaking of a distant mountain world that was fading even when the book was published. The great, exciting, and strangely moving story which it told consolidated Whymper's reputation. He was now, for thousands of people, *the* great British mountaineer. He became a lecturer. He wrote articles on mountains and mountaineering, and in 1872 he once again visited Greenland.

With his commanding figure and fine leonine head, he had a presence about him, slightly overawing and not helped by his rather unfriendly attitude. To many it must have seemed that the memories of the Matterhorn disaster cut him off in some inexplicable way from most other men.

Whatever the riddles of Whymper's character might be—and in some ways he was not only a proud but an unpleasant man—there could be no doubt of his ability either as a draughtsman or as a mountaineer. The fame which the *Scrambles* had helped so much to increase brought him many commissions, and throughout the latter half of the century he continued to illustrate book after book dealing with the

mountains—Bonney's *Alpine Regions*, Grove's *Frosty Caucasus* and Manning's *Swiss Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil* are only some of them.

Something continued to keep him from the difficult rock- and snow-climbing of his earlier years, but the attraction of the great mountains remained. Whympers interest in the scientific problems which they posed continued to increase, and in 1879 he set out on a major expedition to the Andes. His object was to discover how men might live and move at great altitudes, and in the course of his travels he spent more than thirty nights above 14,000 ft. He made the first, and then the second, ascent of Chimborazo, carried out extensive scientific work and, on his return to Britain, lectured at the Royal Institution to an audience that included Edward VII, then Prince of Wales, who moved the vote of thanks. Whympers then departed to begin work on his *Travels amongst the Great Andes of the Equator*, a turgid and disappointing, though scientifically valuable, account of the expedition which appeared some years later.

As he grew older, more and more of his time was spent writing and lecturing on the great days of his youth. At the age of sixty-one he made the first of three journeys to the Canadian Rockies, climbing a number of peaks but leaving the bulk of both the work and the planning to his guides. He wrote small guide-books dealing with Zermatt and Chamonix. He became slightly eccentric, rather more isolated, even less friendly. There was no doubt that he was a

'character', but when he died suddenly in Chamonix in 1911 at the age of seventy-one, he must have seemed to many people a disappointed and rather lonely old fellow.

Yet in almost every country of the world young men—and women—were reading the *Scrambles* and were gaining their first glimpses of the mountain world through the eyes of a master who had been, for a few brief years, the epitome of the heroic age.

II

A. F. MUMMERY

IN the early summer of 1889 a slim, moustached, and gangling-limbed fellow might have been seen climbing horizontally along the chalk cliffs which stretch between Dover and St. Margaret's Bay. He rarely went more than twenty or thirty feet above the level of the sea, and when he did so he took particular care in his handling of the chalk rugosities which stood out from the face of the cliff. He balanced in almost impossible places, where only the most minute piece of chalk seemed to jut out between him and the swelling sea below, and he moved with something of the grace of a ballet-dancer. He seemed not to stand on any one hold but to touch it gently and to move on to the next, travelling horizontally across the face of the cliff until he finally reached the next little yellow beach, took off his glasses, wiped the spray from them and then gazed up with inquiring eyes at the next stretch of dazzling white chalk.

This was Mummery, Albert Frederick Mummery, the great high master of climbing for its own sake.

Few men have looked less like the popular idea of

a mountaineer than Mummery. He did not appear powerful or strong, and he had, in fact, a defect of the spine that throughout the whole of his life prevented him from carrying heavy weights. Yet for more than half a century men who knew him have talked of him with something approaching veneration, and those who did not know him have studied his record and found that it substantiates the legend.

Whether the circumstances of history create great mountaineers—or great men in general—or whether the great characters mould circumstances to their own choice is a point which can be argued indefinitely. It is only necessary here to give the details of Mummery's upbringing and to explain the position that mountaineering had reached as a sport when he was growing from youth into manhood.

He was born on 10 September 1855 in Maison Dieu House, Dover, the solid building that is today the town's public library. His father, William Ridgen Mummery, had lived in Deal until he had purchased the Tanbrook Tannery in Dover, a town of which he subsequently became mayor, and Albert together with his brother, William Gange Mummery, was brought up in the vivid atmosphere of that frontier-port within sight of France.

It is not quite certain *where* he learned to climb. In fact, reading what men who knew him have written about Mummery, it is not certain if he ever *had* to learn how to climb. Late in life, Lord Conway of Allington, who had known Mummery well, gave the

clue when he wrote that: 'He had great muscular strength in arms and legs, and little weight of body for them to raise. He knew by instinct or long experience whether his points of adhesion were sufficient for momentary safety. I doubt if he ever slipped. He was always completely confident. Nothing flurried or hurried him. He could endure any amount of cold, and would sit out through a night in the open at any level.' This was Mummery as Conway had known him at the age of about thirty but somewhere, earlier, he had at least learned the craft of moving about in perilous places. It seems likely that the chalk cliffs of Kent and Sussex taught him that craft, although unfortunately he has left only brief records of those experiences.

Mummery's first visit to Switzerland was in 1871, the year when Whympers' *Scrambles* was published, and a year by which a new pattern of Alpine climbing was already being set. Whympers, it will be remembered, had talked to his friends about 'no more new great mountains' waiting to be conquered after the Matterhorn had been climbed. That was not literally true, for the great rock peak of the Meije in the Dauphiné did not succumb to attack for another three years, yet Whympers' remark was true in substance. There were soon no more *new* great mountains to be climbed.

Mountaineers, into whose veins the attraction of climbing had steadily seeped its way, had more than one answer to this problem that seemed to threaten

their sport. They could start to tackle the great mountains of the ranges outside Europe—the Caucasus, the Himalaya, the mountains of Africa, for instance. They could also tackle the problem in two other ways. They could divide and sub-divide the great mountains so that minor peaks became mountains in their own right; and they could start to make new—and more difficult—routes up old mountains.

It was into this exploding world of new climbing ideas that Mummery was taken by his parents at the age of fifteen. It is not known exactly why the family went, but it must have been something more than a casual trip abroad for young Albert was taken across the Théodule Pass. He never managed to free himself from the impression of that first wild, wonderful glimpse of really high hills. He came down into the Valtournanche, saw the Matterhorn, and, like many before and since, lost his heart to her. 'I remember, as if it were yesterday, my first sight of the great mountain', he wrote twenty years later. 'It was shining in all the calm majesty of a September moon, and, in the stillness of an autumn night, it seemed the very embodiment of mystery and a fitting dwelling place for the spirits with which old legends people its stone-swept slopes.'

Perhaps there is something significant in these words; for whereas Whymper, the 'conqueror' of the Matterhorn, rather tended to ridicule those stories of the ancient gods that guarded the mountain, Mummery—practical man though he was—seems

to have retained about these tales a certain very human awe.

During that first visit to the Alps he did no real climbing. But within three years he was back again, had climbed Monte Rosa, and had made the first of his seven ascents of the Matterhorn. He returned once again and before he was twenty-one had also climbed Mont Blanc and made a second ascent of the Matterhorn.

All this was pedestrian stuff for a climber of Mummery's calibre and in the summer of 1879 the young man, still in his twenties, sailed up into the Alpine firmament. His entry into Alpine history came with his first ascent of the Matterhorn by the Zmutt arête, a classic example of that process of climbing old mountains by new routes that was to enliven the latter third of the nineteenth century.

It will be remembered that the Swiss ridge runs down north-eastwards from the summit of the Matterhorn towards Zermatt and that to the north-west of it rises the great North Face across which Whymper's party had to traverse for a short way on their first ascent. Beyond this north face, bounding its western edge, and dividing it from the western precipices of the mountain, rises the Zmutt ridge. Snow and jagged rocks carry it up to about 13,000 ft. while from the summit it drops down gradually to about 14,000 ft. Between these two points it steepens, becomes perpendicular, and then actually overhangs. It was this ridge that attracted Mummery

when he first studied it in detail soon after he arrived in Switzerland in 1879. Whymper before him had looked up at it and described it as 'totally unassailable'. Most of the guides had thought the same, and it says a lot for the way in which Mummery instinctively saw the chinks in a mountain's armour that he should immediately think the ascent practicable. Having made up his mind about it, he strode down into Zermatt to find a suitable guide.

In Zermatt he met Alois Burgener, an old friend, who revealed that his brother, the famous Alexander Burgener, might be free for the expedition in a few days' time. Burgener was at that time one of the most famous of the up-and-coming younger guides; he was just thirty-three, had been climbing for a number of years with Clinton Dent, one of the leading British mountaineers, and the previous year had taken part with him in the first ascent of the Aiguille du Dru, a formidable pinnacle in the Mont Blanc range that had defied Dent's siege for a number of seasons.

Now in 1879 Mummery was a young and relatively unknown man, the Zmutt ridge was obviously a formidable expedition, and Burgener's reaction to the suggestion that they should attempt it together was not surprising. 'The broad-shouldered Alexander,' Mummery wrote later, 'his face half-hidden in beard, was then interviewed; he bluntly expressed his opinion that to go on such an expedition with a Herr of whom he knew nothing would be a *verflüchte Dummheit*. I was much taken by this bold expression

of opinion, which appeared to me not merely indicative of a wise distrust of an untried climber, but also of a determination to drive home the attack, when once begun, to the utmost limits of possibility.'

Burgener suggested that before they tackled the Zmutt ridge they should make a number of less difficult expeditions together. Mummery agreed, and they therefore set off on a five-day exercise which brought them back to Zermatt only after he had demonstrated to Burgener that he was capable of carrying out such a task as tackling the Zmutt arête; and, incidentally, after they had made two first ascents on minor mountains.

Back at Zermatt Mummery learned to his disgust that William Penhall, a young British climber of about his own age, had already left the village for an attack on the Zmutt ridge. The next morning, however, such a gale was raging round the higher peaks that Penhall's success seemed unlikely; and, sure enough, later in the day Mummery and Burgener saw his party returning and learned that he had abandoned the attempt.

It was here that Mummery's tenacity showed itself. In spite of the bad weather he suggested that Burgener and he, together with their second guide, should start for the Matterhorn and hope for a change in the weather. Burgener ridiculed the idea—all the signs showed that the bad weather would last. Mummery persisted, and later that day they camped

above Zermatt—with the weather still bad. Mummery passed the afternoon in a nap—and was awakened by an amazed Burgener who declared that, against all odds, the weather was actually clearing.

Early the following morning they set off. The difficulties were not quite as great as they had imagined, although there were one or two places where all three men were on awkward ground at the same time and where the slip of one would have meant the destruction of all. Here, although only twenty-four, Mummery appears to have had almost the steadiness of a guide. At one point they traversed off the main ridge. Burgener lost his pipe. There were the usual small incidents of such a climb, but it was only high on the mountain, where the ridge not only steepens into the perpendicular but actually overhangs, that the crux was reached.

Mummery's description of what happened next is revealing—not so much about the climbing itself as about the type of men that he and Burgener were. 'We had now to traverse to our right on to the great western face of the mountain', he says. 'Burgener anxiously scanned the huge cliff and then gripped my hand and exclaimed, "The pipe is avenged, we are on the summit"', which I took to mean that we should be there sometime.

'The men began the construction of a stone man, whilst I utilized the halt in a diligent search for a diminutive chicken which Burgener averred was concealed in the knapsack. We then prepared one of our

numerous bottles for the due reception of our names, and it was subsequently carefully built into the cairn. These duties having been performed, and Burgener having borrowed Gentinetta's pipe—which, by the way, he did not return till we got back to Zermatt—we began the ascent of the western face. We traversed a short distance and then turned straight up over slabby, icy, and somewhat loose rocks. They were not, however, difficult, and we made rapid progress. Probably we should have done better still further to the right, but Burgener was very properly averse to this course, as he thought it might bring us too directly above the other party. Even where we were, he insisted on the utmost care to avoid upsetting stones.'

Soon they were able to traverse back to the main ridge; soon afterwards they had covered the last few hundred easy feet to the summit, and were gazing through the calm air at the cloudless view. Mummery, still a week from his twenty-fourth birthday, was standing on the top of the Matterhorn for the third time.

He had achieved Alpine fame with his first major expedition, and it was a fame that he was to consolidate during the following few years with a series of extraordinary expeditions. After the conquest of the main Alpine peaks, mountain energy was diverted to two main variations on an old theme. One was the climbing of old mountains by new, and usually more difficult, routes; the ascent of the Matterhorn by the

Zmutt ridge was an excellent example of this. The other was the ascent of rock pinnacles and spires that previously would hardly have ranked as separate mountains. Mummery's climbs on the Chamonix aiguilles are a good example of this. Few of the aiguilles, sharp, needle-shaped pinnacles which rise as a line of rocky fangs in the Mont Blanc massif, had been attempted by the pioneers. Now, during the 1880's, they were laid siege to by the second generation of mountaineers, among whom Mummery was to be one of the brightest stars.

The years that consolidated Mummery's position were 1880 and 1881. During them he climbed almost exclusively with Alexander Burgener, a man in whom he inspired near-reverence, and during them he made numerous climbs that are classics of the period—the first ascent of the Furggen ridge of the Matterhorn, his fourth ascent of the mountain; the first passage of the Col du Lion, a desperate venture which for a while trembled on the edge of disaster; and, on the Mont Blanc aiguilles, an attempt on the Dent du Géant and the first ascents of the Grands Charmoz and the Grépon. Many of these expeditions would have been unjustifiable for any team less competent than one composed of Mummery and Burgener, a couple who climbed not so much as amateur and guide as two equal mountaineers, both intent on picking victory from the most dangerous places.

The French have two words, *élan* and *panache*,

which are almost untranslatable; one can perhaps best be described as ardour or dash, and the other as a certain high-spirited, devil-may-care approach to life. Mummery had just those two things in his approach to mountaineering. 'No feeling', he wrote in later life, 'can be more glorious than advancing to attack some gaunt precipitous wall with "comrades staunch as the founders of our race"'. Nothing is more exhilarating than to know that the fingers on one hand can still be trusted with the lives of a party, and that the lower limbs are free from all trace of "knee-dissolving fear", even though the friction of one hobnail on an outward shelving ledge alone checks the hurtling of the body through thin air and the soul (let us hope) to the realms above.' He enjoyed it all immensely, the danger, the excitement, the balancing of his own personal judgement and skill against the problems that the mountains offered. Never before and rarely since has quite such a strong spirit of high adventure flowed into the mountain world.

Two incidents during this first great period of Mummery's climbing illustrate the sort of man he was. The first concerns the Dent du Géant which he tackled unsuccessfully in 1880, building a cairn at the highest point he could reach and leaving his card in it. Two years later an Italian party engineered its way up the mountain, using various devices that in that different age were considered as hardly sporting. On reaching Mummery's cairn they looked inside it, found his card, and read on it the words he had written

two years previously: 'Absolutely inaccessible by fair means.'

The second incident concerns Mummery's conquest of the Grépon, the rock mass consisting of 'great towers, rising a hundred feet or more in single obelisks of unbroken granite, seeming to bar all possibility of progress'. It was one of the most formidable of the Chamonix aiguilles and throughout the winter of 1880, Mummery cogitated on the various ways by which it might be climbed. The following summer he tackled Burgener about the project, and together they worked out a route by which the summit might be reached, a route which went up from the Mer de Glace to a gap between the Grépon itself and the neighbouring Aiguille des Grands Charmoz, which he had climbed the previous year. This route they found was impracticable.

Two days later they set out again, Mummery, Burgener, and a second guide, Venetz. This time they made for the couloir that ran down from the Grépon-Charmoz gap on the other side of the mountain. This couloir, they found, was considerably easier than the one they had tried two days previously, and they ascended without too much difficulty. However, an occasional stone whistled down it, and to men of different quality the position, thousands of feet above the Nantillons Glacier, might have been disturbing. The real difficulties began only some seventy feet below the little col for which they were making, and it was here that Venetz was put into the lead and

succeeded in inching his way up a narrow crack that eventually led to the ridge. Above this their main troubles were over, although delicate climbing was needed, and at one place, where they had to move with knees on one rock and backs on another, Burgener shouted an anguished word of warning. 'On my emergence into daylight his anxiety was explained', says Mummery. 'Was not the knapsack on my shoulders, and were not sundry half-bottles of Bouvier in the knapsack?'

Soon, however, they were on the long and narrow summit ridge, toasting their success in the accustomed manner, feeling, as Mummery says, 'that our work was over, our summit won, and that we might revel in the warm sunshine and glorious view'.

This surely was enough. The Grépon had been climbed.

Yet, for a man of Mummery's mark, it was not *quite* enough.

'That night', he wrote later, 'my dreams were troubled by visions of a great square tower—the great square tower that at the other end of the summit ridge had thrust its shoulders above the snows of the Col du Géant, and though the men had stoutly maintained that our peak was highest, I felt that the delights of an untroubled mind and a conscience void of offence must be for ever abandoned if up that tower I did not go.'

For Mummery these doubts could have only one result. There was one day's rest and then, at two



EDWARD WHYMPER
(taken in Switzerland during the early 1860's)



A F MUMMERY
with his daughter

the following morning the party set off once again and repeated the earlier expedition. This time, however, they traversed along just below the summit ridge until they finally came to the foot of what they now agreed was the topmost tower of the Grépon. It was, says Mummery, one of the most forbidding rocks he had ever seen, smooth to the touch, rearing up vertically, and split only by one single crack. This crack, four or five inches wide, had straight-cut edges and, perhaps the worst point of all, ended under an overhanging block that appeared to form the summit itself.

First of all the party decided to lasso the topmost block and then try to swarm up the rope. Then necessity became a virtue; they decided that the crack would really have to be climbed properly—for all their efforts to lasso the summit failed, and more than once both Mummery and Burgener found themselves in danger of slipping back off their ledge towards the Mer de Glace many thousands of feet below.

They had been standing on a narrow wall about two feet wide and some six feet above the gap from which the crack rose. Now they poked Venetz awake with an ice-axe—he had taken himself to another ledge and gone quietly to sleep after a smoke. ‘Burgener, posted on this wall, stood ready to help Venetz with the ice-axe so soon as he should get within his reach, whilst my unworthy self, planted in the gap, was able to assist him in the first part of his journey’, wrote Mummery later. ‘So soon as Venetz got beyond my reach, Burgener leant across the gap,

and, jamming the point of the axe against the face of the rock, made a series of footholds of doubtful security whereon Venetz could rest and gain strength for each successive effort. At length he got above all these adventitious aids and had to depend exclusively on his splendid skill. Inch by inch he forced his way, gasping for breath, and his hand wandered over the smooth rock in those vague searches for non-existent holds which it is positively painful to witness. Burgener and I watched him with intense anxiety, and it was with no slight feeling of relief that we saw the fingers of one hand reach the firm hold offered by the square-cut top. A few moments rest, and he made his way over the projecting rock, whilst Burgener and I yelled ourselves hoarse. When the rope came down for me, I made a brilliant attempt to ascend unaided. Success attended my first efforts, then came a moment of metaphorical suspense, promptly followed by the real thing; and, kicking like a spider, I was hauled on to the top, where I listened with unruffled composure to sundry sarcastic remarks concerning those who put their trust in tennis shoes and scorn the sweet persuasion of the rope.'

Then came Burgener, and the three men carried out the usual formalities. They built a cairn and opened a bottle of champagne.

It will have been noticed that references to the Bouvier are numerous in Mummery's account of his climbs. So, in the one main account of his mountaineering which he has left, *My Climbs in the Alps and*

Caucasus, are the references to food, to the way in which the inn-keepers beguiled him with their fine meals into getting out of condition. Mummery made the most of such references—‘popping his bottles of Bouvier on every summit of the Alps’, as Frank Smythe once described him—but there is little doubt that they illustrate the man. He was no ascetic; he enjoyed himself off the mountain as well as on it, and as a result a certain sparkling quality runs through his account of great mountain adventures that was hardly typical of the times, and which shows him to have been more like our own contemporaries than the Victorians among whom he lived.

The ascent of the Grépon ended the first major phase in Mummery’s climbing career, and soon after it one might well expect to find him a fully fledged member of the Alpine Club. He had, in fact, been proposed for membership of the club soon after his return from the Alps in the early autumn of 1881, and had been black-balled. For many years it was not quite clear why this was so, and it was uncharitably suggested that the reason was Mummery’s position in the social scale. It has been suggested that his application was rejected because he was a tanner and was, therefore, in the Victorian phrase, ‘trade’. The truth appears to have been rather different. He was, in any case, something very different from a tanner; he was the part-owner with his brother of an important tannery business, his father had been Mayor of Dover, and the family had an established position

not only in the town but throughout most of Kent. The truth was that there was, in the Alpine Club at that time, a small but relatively influential body of men who were somewhat disconcerted by Mummery's swift rise to fame. He was, in any case, slightly unconventional; he had views of his own on most things, and was not averse to pressing them. Like most men of strong opinions, he made enemies, and this appears to have lain behind his rejection for the club—a rejection which was regretted by many, possibly the majority, of members.

Mummery did not visit the Alps for six years after his successful attack on the Grépon. Just why this was so is not clear, although it seems that he was deep in the process of what is known as 'settling down'. He had married in 1883; he began to play an increasingly important part in the family business, and except for occasional exploits on the chalk cliffs which rise along the Channel coast, appeared to have given up mountaineering for ever. Throughout the whole of this period, however, he was planning—planning for an expedition not to the Alps but to the Caucasus, that distant range on the frontier of Persia and Russia. Everything was ready by the summer of 1888, but before that he had initiated his wife into the mysteries of mountaineering, making his fifth ascent of the Matterhorn with her in the summer of 1887 and then, in company with his old friend Burgener, taking her up the first ascent of the Teufelsgrat, the south-western ridge of the Taschhorn.

In the spring of 1888 Mummery set out for the Caucasus with Heinrich Zurfluh of Meiringen in Switzerland, a journey of exploration as much as a climbing expedition, for the great range of the Caucasus was still relatively unknown. Although one or two of its major peaks had been climbed—notably Elbruz, the highest peak of all, which had been ascended by Douglas Freshfield as far back as 1868—large areas had been mapped only roughly, and had hardly been visited by Europeans. It was through this country that Mummery travelled with his guide, and the method of their travel is well illustrated by a note which he sent to the *Alpine Journal*. 'No other holiday has afforded me half the pleasure', he said. 'I found the travelling much easier than I had expected. Notwithstanding that my interpreter proved too short-winded for the high passes, I managed to get all I wanted, from chickens, duck's eggs, new potatoes, and Russian bread in Suanetia, to mutton, oat-cakes and fresh milk in Balkar and Chegem. I became great friends with the old chief at Bezingi, who gave me several dinners in his private apartments. I in turn provided tea and sugar for himself and his numerous relatives and friends.' All very different from the desperate adventures on the Chamonix aiguilles, but with a certain interest of its own.

Mummery's *tour de force* during this journey was his ascent of the great peak of Dych Tau. He crossed a number of new passes and carried out much exploratory work, but it was on Dych Tau that he

concentrated his main climbing energies. He made one attempt on the mountain at the beginning of his expedition, but his guide fell ill, and the result was an astonishing solo climb by Mummery, who reached the top of the 13,500-ft. south-western buttress of Dych Tau. From the top he was able to look across at the twin summits of the mountain—and found himself unable to decide which was the higher of the two. 'This doubt, and the fact that much snow was still lying on the huge rock-face, determined me to cross the passes I was anxious to see before attempting the ascent, so that by distant views the doubts as to the true summit might be settled, and by the lapse of time and the Caucasian sun the snow might be, in a measure, melted from the rocks', he explained.

A fortnight later he and his guide were back, facing this great mountain mass, the second-highest peak in the whole of the range. They set up a small but high camp, and left it at 2.30 the following morning. They went up gullies, up ice-slopes, along ridges, and up steep rocks. At one point, on the final peak itself, the position looked more than usually desperate. 'We crawled along the face of the great cliff,' Mummery wrote later, 'clinging to outward shelving and most unsatisfactory ledges, till we reached a place where strenuous efforts just enabled us to lift ourselves over a sort of bulge. Above this the angle was less steep, and a few cracks and splinters enabled us to get a reliable hold. A short distance further, however, a second and, if possible, nastier bulge appeared. After

contemplating Zurfluh's graceful attitudes and listening to his gasps as he battled with the desperate difficulty, it was "borne in upon me"—as the Plymouth Brethren say—that the second peak in the Caucasus ought not to be climbed by an unroped party.'

They therefore roped and continued upwards. Finally they found themselves on the face of the peak itself; a long exposed crack was the key to the final problem, and having climbed it they reached the topmost rock, looking out over a rolling panorama of mountains from which only the immense bulk of Elbruz thrust up higher than their own summit.

The triumph was the culmination of the holiday, and within a few days they had started the long journey home. This Caucasus journey, together with the less strenuous one in the same range which Mummery carried out two years later, marks a period of what might almost be called rest and recuperation in his climbing career. In between the two journeys, he made one visit to the Alps but during it carried out only one climb—the first passage of the Schreckjoch, an expedition which he made guideless.

When in 1890 he returned from the Caucasus for the second time—without having accomplished much of note—his great climbs on the Chamonix aiguilles were nine years back. He was now thirty-five. He was married, he had a prosperous and flourishing business. It might well have been thought that his greatest climbing achievements had already been carried out.

Yet during the early 1890's Mummery, together with a few picked companions, was to embark on an astonishing series of campaigns that were in many way to revolutionize mountaineering.

He climbed, once again, most of the famous Chamonix aiguilles on which he had gained his fame. But he climbed them guideless—relying on the experience and wisdom of himself and his companions. Now guideless climbing had rarely been carried out in the Alps since the exploits of the Rev. Charles Hudson and a few of his companions some forty years previously, and no one had previously climbed such difficult rocks as those of the Chamonix aiguilles without the aid of guides.

That these climbs of the early 1890's were possible was due to two things; one was Mummery's personal climbing ability and his experience and knowledge of the aiguilles; the other was the fact that the birth of rock-climbing in Britain—the ascent of difficult individual crags rather than of mountains—had helped to produce a few exceptional cragsmen whose ability was in many ways equal to that of a guide.

Cecil Slingsby, a great Yorkshireman who had pioneered climbing in Norway in the 1870's; Norman Collie, a unique character who was to climb in most of the major ranges of the world; Ellis Carr, Geoffrey Hastings and Godfrey Solly—these are some of the fine climbers who took part in Mummery's ascents from 1891 to 1895.

He traversed the Charmoz without guides; he made

the first traverse and the second guideless ascent of the Grépon. With Collie, Hastings and Slingsby he made the first ascent of the Dent du Requin—and made it without guides, one of the first occasions on which a major rock-problem of this character had been solved without the use of professional aid. With Collie, Hastings and Miss Bristow, one of the leading women climbers of the time, he made a guideless ascent of the Matterhorn from the Italian side—and descended in a great storm, ‘chased from its shattered crest and down the Italian ridge by the mad fury of thunder, lightning and whirling snow’, as he put it. Then, with Collie and the Duke of the Abruzzi, the great Italian mountaineer, he made the third ascent of the Zmutt arête of the Matterhorn, the route which had first brought him to Alpine notice fifteen years earlier. All these climbs showed that Mummery was now one of the great masters of mountain-craft.

The winter of 1894 that followed the last of these great expeditions was possibly the happiest of Mummery’s whole life, for during it he was engaged in two major projects after his own heart. One was the writing of *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus*, a roistering period-piece of a book in which the author describes with glee his mountaineering exploits of the previous twenty years. The second project was for a Himalayan expedition, an expedition on which he was to be joined by Collie and Hastings, and the preparations for which continued throughout the winter and into the following spring.

Mummery put much hard work into the *Climbs*. The book, he had at first intended, should be a semi-personal one, written mainly for friends and the relatively small number of mountaineers who he felt would be interested. He therefore wished to include as much factual mountaineering detail as possible but—and it was a big but—when he began the business of collating his material he found that the detail was most meagre. Notes scribbled on the back of an hotel bill or pencilled on a visiting card—these, according to his wife, were the raw materials with which he had to work. It is, perhaps, as well that this was so, for the *Climbs*, next to Whymper's *Scrambles* the greatest mountaineering masterpiece that the nineteenth century produced, has a spontaneity that might otherwise have been submerged in a welter of fact and figure. 'I fear no contributions to science, or topography, or learning of any sort are to be found sandwiched in between the story of crags and seracs, of driving storm and perfect weather', Mummery wrote in his Preface. 'To tell the truth, I have only the vaguest ideas about theodolites, and as for plane tables, their very name is an abomination.' To this the reader can only answer 'Thank Heavens.' From a strictly literary point of view, Mummery's book has its defects. He was not, after all, a professional writer. The Victorian humour looks a little forced to modern eyes, while the portraits of some of the guides are painted larger than life. Yet, this apart, the *Climbs* is possibly one of the most successful books of its type ever

written. Reading its pages one can almost see the blaze of the camp-fire reflected off the dark rocks; can almost feel the rough granite of the Chamonix aiguilles; and, above all, can somehow manage to share Mummery's exultation as he lives on from one dangerous minute to the next. As the pages are turned, one almost expects to hear the regular chip, chip, chip, of the ice-axe at work.

As Mummery carefully shaped the text of his book during the winter evenings, preparations went on for the expedition that was, as he subsequently wrote, 'the ambition of my life'. It is difficult today to understand exactly what these must have been like. Today many Himalayan expeditions are of national importance. Many are supported or sponsored by academic or scientific bodies. Manufacturers help with equipment, and the 'rights' in the narratives of the expeditions are often sold in advance for large sums. Many many mountaineers regret all this, but it is part of the framework within which many of them must work if they wish to get to the Himalaya at all. Mummery's expedition was nothing at all like this. He and his two friends just decided to go to the Himalaya, and once the decision was made, the rest was a matter of personal planning and personal finance. Officialdom entered into the matter at only one point—permission had to be obtained from the British authorities to enter Kashmir. All was in doubt, therefore, until a day early in 1895 when Mummery wrote to Collie saying: 'Praise God and get your luggage ready. Viceroy

telegraphs to Godley "Please communicate the following to Mummery, your proposal accepted".'

All was now set, and on 20 June Mummery, Collie and Hastings sailed for Bombay. Their goal was Nanga Parbat, the great peak rising in the state of Kashmir at the western end of the Himalaya. It is not quite clear why Mummery chose Nanga Parbat rather than any of the other peaks of the chain. But he had certainly heard reports of the mountain, with its tremendous southern precipices, rising from the floor of the Indus Valley for nearly 24,000 ft. to the 26,620-ft. summit—one of the most impressive mountain faces in the whole of the world—and it seems likely that this great face was a challenge to him.

Whatever the reason, the party was confident of success, and in view of subsequent history, one can only be surprised at the optimistic letters which from the first few days after his arrival in Kashmir, Mummery sent back home. It was partly, of course, that he wished to allay any fears that his wife had. The expedition, he stressed, was a much safer thing than the journey to the Caucasus. He would take great care, and there was really no need to worry. 'I don't think there will be any serious mountaineering difficulties on Nanga,' he wrote, 'and the peak is much freer from hanging glaciers than I had expected. I fancy that the ascent will be mainly a question of endurance.'

At the foot of the mountain they were joined for a while by a young Indian Army officer, a Major Bruce, who was later to play an important part in the attempts

to climb Everest. Bruce was even in those days an expert with the native Gurkhas, two of whom he had brought along for use by the expedition. He knew the mechanics of moving about such country, he knew the customs and the routine of hiring porters and animals and food, and in a dozen such ways he ironed out the problems of the three Englishmen, none of whom had visited the arca before.

As the British party studied the mountain more carefully, they realized that all would not be as easy as they had imagined. And in Mummery's letters back home the early optimism is gradually replaced by phrases along the lines of 'when' we climb Nanga, 'if' we climb Nanga, and finally 'even if we don't' climb Nanga.

Once it was realized that any attempt to climb the great southern face would be doomed, the members of the party agreed that their best course was to cross one of the minor spurs that ran down from the summit and make their attempt from the other side of the mountain, from the direction of the Diamirai Glacier. They all moved up over the ridge and down to their new base—not without difficulty, for the country was virtually unknown and their supplies were only just adequate.

Once settled into the Diamirai valley, they set about studying the face of Nanga Parbat from this side—and about getting into the best possible condition for their attempt on the summit.

As part of their plan to get themselves as fit as

possible, Mummery and Collie decided to tackle a fine mountain that lay to the south of their camp. This was the Diamirai Peak. They estimated its height to be about 19,000 ft. and they felt that by climbing it they would not only get themselves into better condition but would also gain a useful view of the surrounding mountains.

They set off on the morning of 11 August, Mummery, Collie, two Gurkhas named Ragobir and Lor Khan, and Hastings, who was going back with two coolies and a headman to their former base for more supplies. Mummery and his party soon left Hastings and made straight up the lower slopes of their mountain. They were high up before dawn broke, and as the light increased they looked out across a tremendous panorama of peaks, snow summit after snow summit forming a great barrier to their north—the joint frontier of the English and the Russian empires. Higher and higher they went, up snow ridges that grew ever steeper.

Mummery led, cutting steps where necessary, and behind him came Ragobir, followed by Collie and Lor Khan. At one point the ridge steepened yet again and Collie, waiting in his steps as Mummery cut higher up the slope, used the time to enlarge the footholds. 'The position was a sensational one', he wrote later; 'we were crossing the steepest ice slope of any great size I had ever been on; below us it shot straight down some 2,000 ft. without a break, till the angle became less in a small snow basin. The next objects

that met the eye were the stone slopes far below in the valley, and unconsciously I began to picture to myself the duration and the result of an involuntary glissade on such a mountain-side.'

It was here that Lor Khan proved his worth. He had no experience of high snow mountains and his footwear—surprising as it sounds to modern ears—consisted merely of skins wrapped round his feet. It is hardly surprising that on this part of a steep and dangerously exposed traverse there suddenly came from him a startled exclamation. 'He had slipped out of one of the steps, and hung with his face to the glistening ice, whilst under him the thin coating of snow peeled off the face of the slope in great and ever-widening masses, gathering in volume as it plunged headlong down the mountain-side, finally to disappear over the cliffs thousands of feet below', wrote Collie. 'For the time being I was fascinated by the descending avalanche, my whole mind being occupied with but this one thought, that if Lor Khan began to struggle and jerk at the rope I should without a doubt be pulled out of my steps. My fears proved groundless. Although Lor Khan had lost his footing he never lost either his head or his axe, and was just able to reach with his hand one of the steps out of which he had fallen.'

Lor Khan cut himself another step and climbed back into relative safety. The crisis was over. But it must have been a near thing—and there was another half-hour's traverse of the slope to be finished before the

party finally left the ice and stepped on to the snow beneath the first summit of the mountain.

Mummery, it is worth noting, had led for the whole of the climb of from 6,000 to 7,000 ft. from the valley floor. For a lot of the way he had had to break trail, so to speak, making steps in snow, and later he had had to cut steps for hundreds of feet. Yet he was still perfectly fresh, and could have gone on for hours.

The worst of the day was over. The party decided to return by another route that involved a number of difficult rock-pitches, but they had nothing quite like the long ice-traverse, and they finally arrived back at camp late that night without further trouble.

The party then felt ready to tackle Nanga Parbat. Above their camp-site, rising in a tangle of rock-rib and ice-couloirs, from the Diamirai Glacier, rose the huge north-west face of the mountain, thousands of feet high and ending in a great snowfield below the summit of the peak itself. If one could only reach this snowfield, which provided the raw material for immense avalanches which almost continually swept the north-west face itself, then the summit itself would probably be reached.

But what about the avalanches? Mummery, surveying the face, believed that he discerned a rock-rib that stood so far out from the general run of the face as to be free from such dangers. This rib presented a possible route, and up this rib he determined to go.

At first the attempt was postponed, in the hope that

Hastings might return from his task of getting fresh supplies. Then it was decided to strike while the weather held good. Collie had by this time been weakened by the unaccustomed food, Lor Khan had been sent down the valley—presumably in search of supplies—so that only Mummery and Ragobir were available for the attempt. On 19 August they set off from camp, carrying on their backs two small tents weighing only some 3 lb. each—the invention of Mummery himself—and rucksacks full of food. ‘A more hazardous and desperate feat has seldom been undertaken in the whole history of mountaineering’, wrote Bruce nearly forty years later. When all things are taken into consideration—the lack of reserves, the completely unknown nature of the ground to be covered—the same might be said even today.

Few details of this astonishing attempt have survived, but enough are known to show its extraordinary character. The great rib, split into three main parts and separated by snow and ice patches, was rather like those which Mummery had tackled on the Chamonix aiguilles. But it was immensely longer—thousands instead of hundreds of feet in height—and it was, apparently, of quite the same standard of difficulty.

Up this rib Mummery and Ragobir slowly made their way on 19 August. At places, snow and ice intervened, but for most of the time they were climbing up exceedingly steep rock on a narrow structure hemmed in on either side by great gullies. Down these gullies,

snow and ice avalanches roared almost continuously. Often they seemed to fill the gullies and threaten to burst out from them. At one point Collie, watching from far below in the valley, saw the two tiny figures of Mummery and Ragobir completely obscured by gigantic clouds of snow dust which rose up from the gullies over the rib itself.

That first night out, they camped on the rib. On the second day they continued their journey upwards, moving higher and higher still, closer and closer towards the edge of the snowfield that Mummery thought would provide the clue to the ascent. That second night they camped on the top of the second portion of the rib. The third day they went on again, the avalanches still thundering down on either side, almost within touching distance it seemed. At one point they actually looked back to see that an avalanche, tearing down the trough to one side, had leaped from its containing walls on to the rock ridge itself and carried away the tent and rucksacks they had left hundreds of feet below!

Now, at a height of nearly 21,000 ft. they were almost within striking distance of the snowfield. And now, at the crucial moment, Ragobir fell ill. The reason sounds strange to modern ears—neither Mummery nor Ragobir spoke a word of the other's language, and as a result the Gurkha had either brought no food with him or had finished it at the first bivouac. He had therefore climbed for at least a day with an empty stomach; now he had collapsed, and

there was only one thing for the two men to do. They went back down the narrow rib, Mummery 'nursing' the sick man, still confident that had he only been able to go on and reach the snowfield he would have found the key to success.

Mummery and Ragobir descended the rib in a single day. Back in camp they found Collie. Hastings later joined them, and all held a council of war. Mummery now felt that the rib up which he and Ragobir had forced a way was perhaps too difficult. Why not, he suggested, try yet a third possibility.

It will be remembered that the southern face had been considered impracticable. The northern slopes of the mountain were divided into two separate parts—the face above the Diamirai Glacier, on which they were now encamped, and the face, farther to the east, which rose above another great glacier, the Rakhiot glacier. It was to this third and so far unseen face that Mummery now suggested they should turn. The Rakhiot and Diamirai Glaciers were divided by a long rocky spur running northwards from Nanga Parbat towards a subsidiary summit known as the Gonalo Peak; at one point this ridge dropped down to a relatively low pass, and from the pass itself a glacier-filled trough ran down towards the Diamirai camp. Beyond the Gonalo Peak the ridge dropped down towards easier country.

So the matter was decided. Hastings and Collie together with the men would move camp round the far side of the Gonalo Peak, through the easier

country, and then up into the Rakhiot Valley beyond the ridge. Mummery, accompanied by the two Gurkhas, would go by the shorter route up the glacier-filled trough to the pass and then down to the Rakhiot Glacier on the far side. This route was obviously too difficult to allow the passage of the camp and the supplies, but by taking it Mummery would gain a useful view of the face above the Rakhiot Glacier that they planned to tackle next.

On the morning of 24 August Mummery and the two Gurkhas, together with two of the men who were to take their spare rucksacks for part of the way, left camp for the pass. Later in the day the men returned, and Hastings and Collie set off on the longer route round the ridge.

A day or so later the larger party reached the Rakhiot Glacier, welcomed by thunder and rain. They marched through a cold mist that rarely lifted, but as they had come over the last little rise into the Rakhiot Valley, the clouds had lifted and they had gained a glimpse of the long ridge around which they had come. They could also see the Rakhiot slope of the pass for which Mummery had been making from the other side. 'It seemed quite hopeless', Collie wrote later. 'I spent about half an hour looking through a powerful telescope for any traces of steps cut down the only ridge that looked at all feasible. I could see none. Hastings and I were therefore of the opinion that Mummery had turned back.' He had told them that he would do so if the descent from the pass looked too

difficult, and they therefore set up camp and waited for him to follow them by the longer route. It seemed likely that he might be short of food so men were sent round to meet him. They returned two days later—having been back to the Diamirai Glacier, and having found no traces of Mummery or the Gurkhas.

It was obvious then that something had gone seriously wrong, and a return was made to the Diamirai Glacier. Still there was no trace of Mummery. The search went on—but neither Mummery nor the Gurkhas were ever seen again.

Just how Mummery died is likely to remain for ever unknown. The most likely possibility is that he and his companions were swept away by one of the great avalanches whose tremendous size he might, for all his mountain experience, easily have misjudged.

When Mummery died he was only forty. He was at the height of his powers, and his death, quite apart from its personal tragedy, was a tremendous loss to British mountaineering. Yet it may be wondered whether Mummery, had he been able to take the same risks once again, would have acted so very differently. For he did not really believe, as did many of his contemporaries, that if a mountaineer took all reasonable precautions the accident would only happen to someone else. He knew that once a man went beyond a certain point he lived on borrowed time, and he thought that the view from beyond that point made the risk worth while. His mind was always as mentally in balance as was his body. One feels that he was always

ready to pay up should there come, as he might well have put it himself in his rather florid Victorian prose, that demand from the Great Avenger, Death itself.

It came. He paid.

III

J. NORMAN COLLIE

GREAT mountaineers are not necessarily great men. They may have the ability to climb fearlessly in delicate and exposed places that is the hallmark of the cragsman, they may be able to gain the 'feel' of a mountain in some almost psychic way, yet they may still be relatively ordinary mortals when off the hills. It is disappointing but true that their stature can decrease when they are seen in the illuminating glare of non-heroic circumstances. This was not true of Norman Collie, a lone, mystic, contradictory man, distinguished in half a dozen different fields, who brought to everything that he handled a certain personal touch of distinction.

Collie was born in 1859 at Alderley Edge, a few miles from Manchester, the second son of John Collie and the grandson of George Collie, an Aberdeen merchant whose ancestors had come from Ireland in the days of Cromwell. From the age of six to the age of eleven he spent much time on Deeside, and though he was later sent to school in the south of England, it was during those five formative years of fishing, scrambling and bird-watching on the slopes of the

Cairngorms that he trained himself as a critical observer—a training which was after to be of immense service to him both in mountaineering and in chemistry, the two fields in which he gained greatest fame.

A mystic yet a professor of chemistry. A man of the world who travelled in most of the greater ranges yet who regarded the Cuillin of Skye as the finest of them all. A trained scientist who yet claimed to have stood—and run—in the presence of Britain's only mountain ghost. A fine artist—and an art connoisseur and collector who in his own sphere had few rivals—who was also a pioneer in colour photography. This was Collie, a man who 'remained to the end wholly and passionately absorbed in the mountain world', yet who once sardonically observed that: 'If anyone ever happens to write an obituary of me, I want two things said—I first discovered Neon, and I took the first X-ray photographs.'

These are some of the contradictory elements that contributed to this unusual man who grew up in the leisured professional atmosphere of the late Victorian era. So far as the Alps were concerned he was contemporary with the second generation of great mountaineers—the men who were by this time finding their ways up old mountains by new routes and who were 'creating' new peaks by the division and sub-division of the higher summits into smaller and ever smaller peaklets. In Britain, mountaineering as a sport had hardly begun, although in the misty island of Skye, a magic country off the west coast of Scotland, there

still, in the 1880's, remained mountain peaks which had not, as the Victorians would have said, 'been trodden by the foot of man'. It was here, almost accidentally, that Collie began his great career as a climber.

The date was 1886, he was just twenty-seven, and he had gone with his elder brother to the west coast of Scotland. They heard good reports of the fishing on the island of Skye, crossed over to the island—and found to their disappointment that there was little water in the streams and that the fishing was poorer than expected. It was, in fact, almost a wasted journey. And then, shortly before they were to return to the mainland, they went for a stroll across the heather towards the blue Cuillin whose ridge of jagged gabbro peaks forms a horseshoe-shaped line of battlements and turrets, pinnacles and arêtes, that has no equal anywhere in Britain.

On that morning, purely by chance, two other young men, A. H. Stocker and A. G. Parker, were actually climbing on the Cuillin. A few years previously they had raised Alpine eyebrows by making the first climb up the great rock-face of Lliwedd, the twin-peaked summit that rises in the Snowdon group. Now they were making a new route on the face of Knight's Peak on Sgurr nan Gillean and it was here that they were seen by Collie and his brother.

'Hundreds of feet above me,' he later wrote, 'on what appeared to me to be rocks as steep as the walls of a house, they moved slowly backwards and forwards, but always getting higher, till they finally

reached the summit. I knew nothing about climbing, and it seemed to me perfectly marvellous that human beings should be able to do such things.'

Collie needed no more encouragement. He wired to London for a rope to be sent, and within a few days had scaled, not the rock-face tackled by Stocker and Parker, but an easier route which brought him to the summit of Sgurr nan Gilleann.

From that time onwards, mountaineering in general and the mountains of Skye in particular began to dominate Collie's life. He had the equipment, mental and physical, of the climber. He was long-limbed, even in proportion to his height, and he was of more than average stature. Moreover, he was a tremendous goer, who seemed tireless and inexhaustible to most of his companions. Mentally, he had the scientist's approach to mountain problems, an approach livened by an instinctive 'feel' for mountains that produced what one authority called an 'inspired direction' that was his main characteristic when it came to route-finding on a rock-face, or to dealing with one of the major problems of mountain topography.

These faculties Collie harnessed to a whole series of mountain explorations. They fall into three fairly distinct groups, each one of which seemed to satisfy him in a slightly different way and to illustrate a different aspect of his character. There was first of all the climbing which he carried out for nearly a third of a century in his beloved Skye; here he became the great master, knowing every crag and

every corrie—he was largely responsible for filling in many of the gaps on the Ordnance Survey maps—and becoming, with his constant companion John Mackenzie, an almost legendary figure. Secondly, there was his climbing elsewhere in Britain. He took part in the early explorations of the great cliffs of Ben Nevis, was largely responsible for the ‘opening-up’ of Glencoe as a climbing ground; and, in Moss Ghyll, was responsible for cutting the famous ‘Collie Step’, one of the most celebrated incidents in all British climbing history. Thirdly there were his explorations abroad—not only in the Alps, where he took part with such companions as Mummery, Hastings and Slingsby in a number of classic first ascents, but also in the Lofoten Islands off Northern Norway, in the Himalaya, and in the Canadian Rockies where in 1898 he played a prominent part in discovering the great Columbia icefield.

The Cuillin hills of Skye were not only Collie’s first but also his longest-lasting love. There were apparently three reasons for this. The first was that their mystery, the beauty of their colour and form, even their position on the western rim of Britain, all appealed to the Celtic other-worldliness that was rarely entirely dissociated from Collie’s actions.

The second attraction of Skye sprang from the fact that even in the late 1880’s a climber going into the recesses of the Cuillin was still in many ways a genuine explorer. Skye’s unclimbed peaks gave it an advantage over the Alps. It had more than one local

guide, and it had a supply of men who would carry up into the corries, the Scottish equivalent of the Alpine porter—all facts which helped to give the Cuillin an atmosphere entirely different from that of any other British hills of the period.

Thirdly, Collie found in Skye the ideal mountain companion. This was the great Skye guide, John Mackenzie. For nearly fifty years, summer after summer, 'John and the doctor' would climb, explore, scramble, and fish together until, as a friend wrote, 'John was more than a friend to him; one would almost think he was his other self.'

John had been born near Sligachan, the little hamlet from which many of the early Skye climbs were made, three years earlier than Collie, and he had climbed the ridges of Sgurr nan Gilleann at the age of ten. He had been with such pioneers as the Pilkington brothers, who had come to the island a few years before Collie, and who had made the first ascent of the famous 'Inaccessible Pinnacle'—one of the last rock-spires in Britain to retain that description. John had been with more than one member of the Alpine Club who had come to Skye in the early 1880's; by the time he met Collie he was a first-class rock-climber, and there is little doubt that much of Collie's later proficiency on rock was gained by emulating John Mackenzie.

On his second visit to the island, in 1889, he set about the real business of exploring, and made the first of his many first ascents—that of the spectacularly

shaped Bhasteir Tooth, one of the many pinnacles on the main Cuillin ridge which had been avoided by all the earlier climbers. Many similar exploits were to follow, and in 1891 Collie and Mackenzie, aided by another climber called W. W. King, finally succeeded in crossing the Thearlaich-Dubh Gap, one of the last untraversed parts of the main Cuillin ridge.

By this time there was no doubt either of Collie's enthusiasm for mountaineering or of his climbing ability. He made his first visit to the Alps, joined the Alpine Club, and within a few years was making ascents in Switzerland and France as difficult as any that had been made there. It is as well to continue here, however, with the story of his climbing in Britain for it was here that he learned much of his craft, thus being one of the first genuinely 'British-trained' climbers to attain first-class rank in the Alps.

Skye was, of course, his main climbing ground—not only because of the fascination which its unclimbed peaks offered but also because, by the early 1880's, genuine rock-climbing, as the word is understood today, had hardly been started on the Scottish mainland. Collie was, in fact, one of a small party who first showed that fine rock-climbing could be found here, a party which shortly after the Easter of 1894 inaugurated a new phase in Scottish mountaineering.

The party consisted of Collie himself; Dr. Joseph Collier, a Manchester surgeon whom Collie knew well, who had climbed in both the Alps and the Caucasus, and who was one of the most expert of British

rock-climbers; and Godfrey Solly, a Birkenhead solicitor who had been with Collier in the Caucasus, who had already climbed in the Alps for eight seasons and who had made many important climbs in the English Lakes.

The trio attended the Easter Meet of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, formed a few years earlier, at the little inn at Inveroran on Loch Tulla. Then, after the Meet had ended, they left Inveroran, had tents and camping equipment taken by cart to Glencoe, and camped at the foot of Buchaille Etive Mor, the mountain whose great northern face, seamed by gullies and ridged by arêtes, is today one of the most frequented climbing grounds in the whole of Scotland.

In 1894 this face had been hardly touched, and the route which the three men forced up the mountain was the first rock-climb to be made on it. It is something of a tribute to Collie, the least experienced of the party, that the route was christened Collie's Climb, a name which remains to this day and suggests that it was Collie himself who led the climb. The party then moved down Glencoe, camped again near Clachaig Hotel, made a number of new climbs on the buttresses of Bidean nam Bian and, before moving on, tackled the immense gully which splits the cliffs behind the inn. They were defeated in this attempt, and 'only escaped out of the gully with difficulty by means of a traverse to the right'—a fact which is hardly surprising when one realizes that the gully was only climbed for the first time more than forty years later!

Collie and his friends then moved on to Fort William. Today, when the great stretch of cliffs which fall from the summit plateau of Ben Nevis to the Aalt a Mhuilinn Glen is among the most famous in Britain, it is difficult to imagine the innovation that this move represented. Yet even a year later it was recorded that 'the suggestion that the Club'—the Scottish Mountaineering Club—'should have its Easter Meet at Fort William was received with dismay, as it was only a very chosen few who knew that there was anything in the district to climb'.

To tramp up the Aalt a Mhuilinn and look for a climb was almost revolutionary; that the party did so was almost certainly due to Collie with his stories of fine routes on Skye.

In the Glen they gazed in admiration and wonder at the cascade of ridge and tower and minaret, gully and slab and pinnacle, which dropped down from the summit plateau of Ben Nevis to the floor of the Glen some 2,000 ft. below. Much of the precipice was sheathed in ice and snow; here, they may well have thought, was a British playground that could in some ways almost equal those to be found in the Alps. They made for the centre of the cliffs, roped, and then started up the great ridge that projected farthest into the Mhuilinn Glen. Finally, in the afternoon, they found themselves on the highest point in Britain, having succeeded in climbing the Ben by 'the ridge which projects from the middle of the great northern precipices nearly right underneath the Observatory, a

superb climb of about 2,000 ft. of ice, snow, and rock, that took about five hours of continuous work'.

They had, in fact, made the first *ascent* of the now famous Tower Ridge, the longest summer rock-climb to be found in Britain, and a climb which in winter can repulse even the strongest of Alpine-trained parties. Collie did, in fact, consider it similar in many respects to the Italian ridge of the Matterhorn, and always maintained that it was the finest climb he knew in Scotland. Two years earlier another English party had climbed the lower part of the route and had the following day climbed Ben Nevis by the path and *descended* the same ridge; as, however, they had left no record of their climb, it was only with the ascent by Collie's party that the fame of the cliffs began to spread.

Collier and Solly now had to leave the party, but Collie was joined by Geoffrey Hastings with whom he had already climbed in the Alps. Together they made another ascent of the Ben from the Aalt a Mhuilinn Glen—apparently by the Tower Ridge again, although this fact is not certain—went south to Glencoe and there made four new ascents in as many days, one on a huge rock tooth now known as Collie's Pinnacle. This was indeed an astonishing campaign. Moreover, it was decisively to alter the character of Scottish mountaineering by injecting into it the cragsman's quality that had previously been seen only in the English Lakeland, where rock-climbing for

its own sake had been developed since the early 1880's.

Collie was climbing, throughout the whole of this Scottish Easter holiday, with men who were his seniors, either in age, in climbing experience, or both, yet he was, one feels from the records which have been left, the innovator, the imaginative man among the party who could 'instinctively' assess what could be climbed and what would be worth climbing. Already, his training as an observer, as a noter of the angle at which light struck rock, of the lines of weaknesses which crossed a mountain face, was beginning to give him an ability greater than that of his companions.

He had already developed an almost clinical interest in everything connected with the Scottish mountains, and particularly with the Cuillin, especially the whole range of gaps in the Ordnance Survey maps of the range. At that time even the six-inch maps showed the height of only eleven of the thirty-odd main peaks of the Cuillin. Collie set about rectifying the omission, and for many years interspersed his purely climbing expeditions with those in which he checked and re-checked the heights of the various Cuillin summits. The method that he used was an arduous one but the best in view of the equipment which he had to hand, the aneroid barometer, and the constantly changing weather of Skye where the barometer rarely remains constant for long. He would climb to the summit of a peak whose height was known, set his aneroid to this

height, traverse along the Cuillin ridge for an hour or so, taking the heights of the various summits over which he passed, and then check the accuracy of his barometer when he once again reached a summit whose height was already known. In this way he found the heights of more than sixty summits and near-summits, confirmed that Sgurr Alasdair at 3,275 ft. was the highest of the Cuillin, and that the main ridge contained some twenty peaks of more than 3,000 ft. in height.

This faculty for detailed observation was, in Skye, to lead to the most remarkable of all his British mountain discoveries, but before he made it he took part, in 1896, in a climb which virtually ended an era. It was the ascent, made with John Mackenzie, Howell and Naismith—the latter ‘the father of Scottish mountaineering’—of the peak of Sgurr Coir an Lochain in the Cuillin. The climb was a relatively simple one, made at the end of a long attack on the Cuillin peaks by many members of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, but it was important for one reason. Collie and his companions, standing on the summit, had climbed the last of Britain’s unclimbed mountains.

Collie was no Whymper, however. Even though there were no more ‘new great mountains’ to be climbed in Skye, the island held its fascination. He continued to return, summer after summer, and in 1899 visited the island at the same time as Major Bruce, the Indian Army officer who had helped Mumery’s party on the approaches to Nanga Parbat.

Bruce was in Skye with a young Gurkha whom he was training for mountain work, and the two visitors spent many days scrambling over the Cuillin peaks with Collie.

Then one evening, returning late from the summit of Sgurr Alasdair, the three of them glanced up at the great cliffs of Sron na Ciche on the south side of Corrie Lagan. Collie had passed the same spot many times, but not when the light was quite as it was that evening, and, looking up, he saw, thrown across the great cliff-face, an immense black shadow. There could be only one meaning to this—that on the rock-face, normally unseen because it merged with the precipice, was some unusual and giant protuberance, jutting from the cliff in a manner which would make it a unique feature. Collie, who was an expert photographer, took the camera from his rucksack and photographed the cliff-face—producing a negative on which all the features of the precipice were thrown into relief by the setting sun.

He vowed to go back to Sron na Ciche as soon as possible, but it was seven years before he could do so, even though he was in Skye on a number of occasions during the interval.

When he did finally look up at the rock-wall again he realized what a magnificent climbing ground it offered, a great precipice 1,000 ft. in height, everywhere steep and in some places perpendicular. At mid-height, he now saw, there ran out from the rock-wall, a narrow knife-edge of rock about a hundred feet

long, ending in the curious rock-tower which cast the shadow that had intrigued him years before. Collie was alone, but he immediately tried to find a route up the precipice. He could make little progress, and after various efforts decided to wait until he could utilize the aid of John Mackenzie. The following day the two men looked together up the great precipice from which there sprang that extraordinary rock-feature, the Cioch. Then they set to work.

‘The climb was full of excitement,’ Collie wrote later, ‘for one never knew what was round the next corner. We traversed slabs, we worked up cracks, and went right away from the Cioch, into the gully on the east side of it, losing sight of it altogether. Then we fortunately found a queer traverse that led out of the gully across the perpendicular face of the cliff and back in the direction of the Cioch. But the Cioch itself we could not see until, having got round several corners, suddenly it came into view and we found ourselves on the end of the knife edge. We slowly made our way to the great tower at its end, up which we climbed.’

Collie and John were at last on the top of what is perhaps the most astonishing rock-feature in the whole of Britain, the centre-piece of a face across which rock climbers have since traced a whole maze of routes.

The fact that Collie was able to visit the Cioch easily in 1907 was due to a change in his method of campaigning in Skye. For the first time he forsook Sligachan and, instead, rented Glenbrittle House

together with his artist-friend Colin Phillip. It was a practice they were to continue year after year. From here, the dower house of the McLeod of McLeod, placed at a strategic point near the south-western end of the Cuillin, Collie would range out over the ridges and peaks, sometimes with Phillip, often with John Mackenzie, sometimes alone. Much of his wandering went unrecorded, and in later life he would often smile as he heard how attempts were to be made on some new cliff or crag, would chuckle almost to himself and comment to a few friends: 'They'll find a little cairn there—when they get up!'

These seasons at Glenbrittle House were among the happiest that Collie spent in Skye and there was, perhaps, only one thing about his annual stay there that worried him—the fact that as part of the lease a certain number of stags had to be shot each year. Although a first-rate shot, he would take no part in deer-stalking, inviting his companions to carry out the work. One day he was asked why he himself would never shoot a stag. 'Too high up the scale, my friend', he replied.

Collie's discovery of the Cioch was perhaps his most important single contribution to British mountaineering. The most famous incident in which he took part had occurred several years earlier on the crags of Lakeland. Here he had played a part, together with such pioneers as Haskett-Smith, Slingsby, Solly and Hastings, in opening-up the great crags around Wasdale Head. Of these, the face of Scafell was among the

most famous, a precipice whose smooth walls and slabs had not yet been tackled by the mountaineer, and whose only apparent weaknesses consisted of the great gullies which seamed it from top to bottom. There were three of these, the most easterly being Moss Ghyll, a chasm which until the Christmas of 1892 had defied the assault of many expert parties. All of them had successfully negotiated the lower stretches of the gully but had been brought to a standstill by an overhanging block of rock, hundreds of tons in weight, which formed the roof of a cave and appeared to bar all progress. Collie, together with Geoffrey Hastings and John Wilson Robinson, the latter perhaps the most able of all the purely local climbers, first investigated the gully from the top of Scafell and found that there was no great difficulty once the overhanging block had been surmounted.

All was then set for their attempt. They started up from the foot of Moss Ghyll, successfully reached the 'Tennis Court', a ledge just large enough for the three of them to sit on, and finally gathered, hundreds of feet from the start of their climb, beneath the overhanging block. 'We found that below the great slab which formed the roof another smaller one was jammed in the gully, which, stretching across from side to side, formed the top of a great doorway', Collie wrote later. 'Under this we passed, and clambered up on to the top of it. Over our heads the great rock roof stretched some distance over the ghyll. Our only chance was to traverse straight out along the side of

the ghyll, till one was no longer overshadowed by the roof above, and then if possible climb up the face of the rock and traverse back again above the obstacle into the ghyll once more. This was easier to plan than to carry out; absolutely no handhold, and only one little projecting ledge jutting out about a quarter of an inch and about two inches long to stand on, and six or eight feet of rock wall to be traversed. I was asked to try it. Accordingly, with great deliberation, I stretched out my foot and placed the edge of my toe on the ledge. Just as I was going to put my weight on it, off slipped my toe; and if Hastings had not quickly jerked me back, I should instantly have been dangling on the end of the rope. But we were determined not to be beaten. Hastings' ice-axe was next brought into requisition, and what followed I have no doubt will be severely criticized by more orthodox mountaineers than ourselves. As it was my suggestion, I must take the blame. *Peccavi! I hacked a step in the rock*—and it was very hard work. But I should not advise anyone to try and do the same thing with an ordinary axe. Hastings' axe is an extraordinary one, and was none the worse for the experiment. I then stepped across the *mauvias pas*, clambered up the rock till I reached a spot where a capital hitch could be got over a jutting piece of rock, and the rest of the party followed. We then climbed out of the ghyll on the left, up some interesting slabs of rock.'

Such climbing in Britain, and particularly the comparable climbing in Skye, satisfied many but not all of

those things which Collie's complex character demanded. The greater problems can only be presented by the greater ranges, and it was in the Alps that Collie first sought them. Yet it was not merely the challenge presented by the Chamonix aiguilles which attracted him; it was never *merely* the physical detail of mountain-conquest that intrigued him. He himself gave the clue when he wrote that ' . . . even if I never again had a chance of climbing a first-class peak in the Alps, I would return there to live the lazy, delightful, disreputable life in a tent, near the ice and the snows and the pine-woods, to smell the camp-fire, lie on my back all day amidst the grass and the flowers, listening to the wind, and looking at the sky and the great silent peaks'.

It was in this atmosphere of casual, carefree hedonism that he carried out his great climbs of the 1890's, the first traverse of the Grépon with Mummery, Hastings and Pasteur in 1892, the first ascent of the Dent du Requin in 1893—both of them guideless—and the following year the first guideless ascent of Mont Blanc by the Brenva Glacier. All these were climbs demanding not only high mastery of rock, snow and ice, but also mountaineering judgement of the greatest quality, and while Mummery did the lion's share of the rock-work, and Slingsby came to the fore when it was a question of ice- or snow-work, it was Collie, whose understanding of just how individual components made up a mountain wall, who specialized in route-finding.

On the Dent du Requin, that great rock tooth in the Mont Blanc range, attempted by many previous parties, it was Collie, one may justly infer, who found the key to the problem although in his account of the climb he naturally uses 'we' to describe the decisions made by the members of the party.

With Mummery, Slingsby and Hastings, Collie arrived at the Montenvers Hotel above Chamonix in the latter part of July; and, the weather being fine, they decided to start out the next morning for the Requin, whose ascent they had planned in England. Late the following day they reached a good camping place at the foot of their peak, spread out their sleeping-bags on the level grass, dismissed the porter who had helped to carry up their kit from the Montenvers, and started to survey the Requin once again.

The problem, as they saw it, was to ascend a ridge of the mountain, then, a few hundred feet from the summit, traverse across a difficult face to a small snow-patch, from which steep gullies led to another and more practicable summit ridge. 'Part of the problem was soon very satisfactorily answered', Collie wrote later. 'Just as we were taking our last look at the peak, preparatory to going to bed, a thin-drawn line of mist was observed, some distance underneath the great summit tooth. It floated by the snow patch and then part of it disappeared behind a tooth of rock which was quite invisible from below, unless thrown into relief in this manner. The face, therefore, was much more broken than we were aware

of, and also just in the place we had thought to be most difficult. The traverse from the snow patch to the bottom of the gullies was almost a certainty.'

Those few brief moments of observation as the mist showed up the feasibility of a route did, in fact, help solve the problem, and the Requin was successfully climbed—after a twenty-hour expedition from sleeping-place back to sleeping-place.

On this, as on their similar climbs during the following few years, Collie always favoured the rough bivouac, high up on the mountain, rather than a night spent in a more comfortable hotel. He was, in the best sense of the word, one of the most civilized of men, but he hated the vulgar trappings of civilization that even in his day were bringing something of the shabby mediocrity of urban life to the lower ranges of the Alps. He regretted, one can feel sure, that he had not been born twenty years earlier and thus been able to savour the first fine careless rapture of those who could look on the virtually unclimbed Alps. Something had to take the place of this, and with Collie it was, inevitably, mountaineering in the hitherto unexplored ranges of the world.

In 1895 he went with Mummery and Hastings to the Himalaya. Intimacy with those tremendous mountains—quite apart from the loss of Mummery, about which he rarely spoke—moved him deeply: he appears to have felt overawed as he never was by any other range. It seems, in fact, as though in the Himalaya he felt the rough brush of elemental nature, sought

diligently in other ranges, and here stroking him with a harsher touch than he had expected. 'That which in winter on a Scotch hill would be a slide of snow, and in the Alps an avalanche, becomes amongst these giant peaks an overwhelming cataclysm shaking the solid bases of the hills, and capable with its breath alone of sweeping down forests', he wrote. Here he sensed both warning and fascination, and after the failure of the Nanga Parbat expedition, he never again visited the Himalaya. Instead, he turned to the Lofoten Islands and the Canadian Rockies.

For a man of Collie's disposition, the Lofotens must have seemed like the promised land. Far beyond the Arctic Circle, in a country where during the summer the sun never sets, this small group of islands off the coast of Norway still retains, even today, a reputation for splendid isolation and for fabulous panoramas of rock and ridge rising sheer from the sea. Half a century ago, most of its rock-spires were unclimbed and almost unknown, an additional attraction for Collie who had heard, but had refused to believe, that the land was even more beautiful than Skye.

In 1901 he made his first journey there, waiting impatiently, one may imagine, for that point in the great West Fiord where suddenly, 'far away across thirty miles of blue waters, which slowly pulsate with the long waves of the open sea, appears a wonderful land of sharp-pointed peaks that with a deep sapphire colour outshines the deeper purple of the restless sea'. His companions were Hermann Woolley, Geoffrey

Hastings, and Howard Priestman, some of the very few British mountaineers who had then visited the Lofotens, and together they made more than one first ascent of the amazing rock-spires which thrust up 3,000 or more feet almost directly from the shores of the fiords which carve their way deeply into the group.

Collie returned to this fascinating and almost uninhabited group in 1903 and 1904, happily camping out by the side of the fiords, living the most simple life, exulting, one may imagine, in the fact that in dozens of places it was possible to leave a fine camp-site near the water's edge and to step almost directly on to the lowest pitch of a 3,000-ft. unknown rock-climb. Moreover, it was not only the physical act of mountaineering which he enjoyed. The Lofotens are in their own way among the most beautiful peaks in the world, and that this meant much to Collie can be judged by three sentences that he wrote after making the first ascent of Higrav Tind, the second-highest peak in the islands. 'The afternoon was perfect, only a few clouds floated in the sky', he wrote. 'Far away to the south-west could be seen the outer Lofoten Islands, a mass of tangled mountain forms, in colour every conceivable shade of atmospheric blue and purple, whilst beyond lay the calm glittering ocean, and far far away the last and loneliest of the Lofoten, the island of Rost. Nearer and beneath us were numberless peaks, the majority of them unclimbed. . . .'

The Lofotens were comparable to Skye but they lacked the problems of the bigger ranges, and it was

this, one must assume, that led Collie to continue the explorations of the Rockies which he had started in 1897.

Perhaps the most important and dramatic of all his journeys came on the second of his expeditions, in 1898, when his party, including Hugh Stutfield and Woolley, made the first ascent of Mount Athabasca and discovered the vast and totally unknown Columbia icefield.

They had carried their survey northwards from the point where they left off the previous year, going ever deeper into the forest wilderness from which the great range rose, and taking eighteen days to cover the 150 miles to their base of operations. Opposite their camp rose a great snow-crowned peak, some 12,000 ft. in height, buttressed by rock precipices and hanging glaciers, and throwing down a splendid glacier which wound 'in serpentine sinuosities to the bottom of the valley'. Here, after all their labour, was a fine peak which obviously *had* to be climbed. The following day Collie and Woolley started out, while Stutfield set about replenishing the larder by a hunt for mountain sheep.

Collie and Woolley started up the north-eastern ridge of the mountain, found the limestone rotten, got on to the glacier instead, and eventually found themselves in a great snow-basin beneath the summit. From here they cut up a steep ice-slope on to the ridge once more, only to find that instead of rock there now lay before them a steep ice arête.

'At first there was sufficient snow to enable us to ascend by kicking steps, but soon Woolley was hard at work with the axe', Collie wrote later. 'For two hours almost without intermission was he cutting, and the ridge was almost too steep to allow us to change places. Finally we arrived at a small platform just underneath the precipitous rocks that guard the summit, only to find that they were perpendicular. By carefully skirting round their base to the right a narrow chimney was discovered. It was our last chance; either it had to be climbed, or we should retire beaten. Owing to the excessively broken state of the limestone rock, produced probably by the great extremes of heat and cold, the climbing was not difficult; but there were many loose rocks that to avoid needed exceeding care. With much caution bit by bit we managed to climb up this narrow chimney, expecting to come out within easy reach of the summit; but, as we gained the ridge, a wall of overhanging rock fifteen feet high seemed to bar further progress. After what we had gone through down below, fifteen feet, even though it did overhang, was not going to keep us from the top. How it was surmounted I have forgotten, but I remember how we saw the summit almost within a stone's-throw of us, and how at 5.15 p.m. we stepped on to it. By mercurial barometer its height is 11,900 ft.

'The summit consists of a narrow ridge running east and west. On the south side, about ten feet below this ridge, is a rocky platform from which the snows

have melted, and which forms a sort of pathway along the whole ridge. On this platform we halted.'

All this was good enough—the conquest of a fine peak nearly 12,000 ft. high by a good sporting route. Yet for Collie and Woolley, standing alone on the peak that August day more than half a century ago, there was something more than excitement at the conquest of a mountain. In a world from which, even fifty years ago, the word 'unknown' was steadily being erased, they could, like stout Cortes and his men on that other peak in Darien, 'stare at each other with a wild surmise'. For westwards lay a sight that was worth coming far to see.

'The view that lay before us in the evening light was one that does not often fall to the lot of modern mountaineers', Collie wrote later. 'A new world was spread at our feet; to the westward spread a vast ice-field probably never before seen by human eye, and surrounded entirely by unknown, unnamed, and unclimbed peaks. From its vast expanse of snows the Saskatchewan glacier takes its rise, and it also supplies the head-waters of the Athabasca; while far away to the west, bending over in those unknown valleys glowing with the evening light, the level snows stretched, to finally melt and flow down more than one channel into the Columbia River, and thence to the Pacific Ocean. Beyond the Saskatchewan glacier to the south-east, a high peak (which we have named Mount Saskatchewan) lay between this glacier and the west branch of the North Fork, flat-topped and

covered with snow, on its eastern face a precipitous wall of rock. Mount Lyell and Mount Forbes could be seen far off in the haze. But it was towards the west and the north-west that the chief interest lay. From this great snowfield rose solemnly, like "lonely sea-stacks in mid-ocean", two magnificent peaks which we imagined to be 13,000 or 14,000 ft. high, keeping guard over those unknown western fields of ice.'

Collie set to work with his plane-table, spending an hour and a quarter plotting the main peaks spread out before him across the tremendous panorama. Then the two men started down the north-west arête—it is significant that Collie had 'reconnoitred' the route while Woolley had been cutting the steps up the summit ridge—reaching the comparative safety of the glacier just as the last light faded.

The Rockies, which Collie continued to visit until 1911, were his last great field of exploration. He continued to go regularly to Skye, where John Mackenzie was still his constant companion, but they now sought out the summits more rarely. Collie was now the acknowledged master, not only in Skye, but in most of the mountain world and his experience brought him a whole succession of posts, honorary and otherwise. He became President of the Alpine Club in 1920 and was made an honorary member of the American, the Appalachian, and the Canadian Alpine Clubs as well as the Himalayan Club.

He was an original member of the Mount Everest

Committee which was formed to organize the exploration of the highest mountain in the world—he became its chairman in 1925 in succession to Sir Francis Younghusband—was elected Vice-President of the Royal Geographical Society in 1924, and in 1922 was elected Honorary President of the Cairngorm Club in succession to Lord Bryce.

He was an honoured, almost legendary, figure and it was as such, on 28 November 1925, that he told his curious story of the Grey Man of Ben Macdhui. The occasion was the annual dinner of the Cairngorm Club, held in Aberdeen, and more than 100 members and guests were present—many of them, it may well be felt, partly in the hope of hearing the grand old man speak of his early days. They were not disappointed.

Collie explained how, some years before the turn of the century, he had been walking on an Easter day towards the summit of Ben Macdhui, the highest summit in the Cairngorms, and the second highest in Britain.

‘When not very far from the summit,’ he said, ‘I suddenly heard footsteps on the snow behind me. Confident that some man was following me, I waited for him to join me, but the moment I stopped the footsteps also stopped. When I started on my way again, once more I heard the footsteps clearly. More than ever convinced that some man was on my track, I turned and ran back for some distance, but found no one. Once again I started on my way to the summit

and once again I heard the footsteps which stopped whenever I stopped.

‘When at last I reached the summit the footsteps did not stop but came nearer until they came right up to me. At that instant I was seized with an intolerable fright and I ran my hardest down the mountain-side. No power on earth will ever take me up Ben Macdhui again.’

The footsteps, the presence felt but not seen—these were no less, according to Collie, than manifestations of Ferlas Mhor, the Great Grey Man of Ben Macdhui, a figure previously known almost exclusively to shepherds, stalkers, and others who lived in the lonely country of the Cairngorms.

The local Press printed the story with some gusto, and there were the usual letters explaining that the Grey Man was due to the Brocken Spectre, to wind in the gullies, or to the sound of falling stones. One reader put it down to deer. The Cairngorm Club took care not to associate themselves with the Grey Man story and ‘nonsense’ was the comment of one of their officials. The latest guide to the Cairngorms, published by the Scottish Mountaineering Club, tells the story only in passing, and is careful to add that it ‘is mentioned here purely objectively as a picturesque touch connected with Ben Macdhui’.

It is sometimes suggested that Collie must have been speaking partly with his tongue in his cheek, making the most of a good after-dinner story. Yet it is even now not quite clear how much of the story

Collie himself believed, and there is much evidence to suggest that he believed all of it. Moreover, his story was supported not only by another climber, Dr. Kellas, who was dead by 1925, but who had reported a similar experience on Ben Macdhuì many years earlier, but also by two mountain-walkers who wrote to Collie after his speech. One of them was a well-known Scottish lawyer and the second was a respected scientist, a Fellow of the Linnean Society.

As the 1920's passed into the 1930's, Collie began to spend more time each year at his beloved Sligachan, finally travelling up in early spring and only returning to his home in Kensington as the autumn commenced. He climbed no longer, but his interest in all the mountain world continued unabated. He was at Sligachan when war broke out in 1939 and decided that now, in his eighty-first year, he would not return to London. With all that vast country north of the great glen closed to civilians by wartime regulations, it seemed that Collie's links with the rest of the world would be finally severed, unlikely that there would be any eyewitness of his final days. More than one of his friends were, in fact, refused permission to visit him as his health declined.

Yet by a curious coincidence, Sligachan was visited in the early 1940's by Richard Hillary, a young fighter pilot on leave with a friend. In his book, *The Last Enemy*—published after Collie's death in 1942—Hillary writes of Sligachan that:

'We were alone in the inn save for one old man

who had returned there to die. His hair was white but his face and bearing were still those of a mountaineer, though he must have been a great age. He never spoke but appeared regularly at meals, to take his place at a table tight-pressed against the window, alone with his wine and his memories. We thought him rather fine.'

IV

GEORGE LEIGH-MALLORY

HOWEVER much one argues about mountaineering and its attractions, climbers are usually seen as belonging to one of two groups. There are those who believe that mountaineering is a sport much the same as yachting or big-game hunting or fishing; and there are those who believe that it is also something more—a particular sport that makes a man more aware of the world around him; that, by some process, which he may fail to understand, increases his mental stature and affects his whole outlook on the world around him. George Herbert Leigh-Mallory was a mountaineer of the second kind.

This attitude to mountaineering of the one man whose name is as much linked with Everest as that of Hunt or Hillary, was the distinguishing thing which marked him out from almost all his companions. He was, as it happened, a better rock-climber and snow- and ice-man than most of them. The way in which he understood mountains—an instinct much the same as some men have for horses or dogs—meant that on a mountain he was almost always 'in balance', mentally as well as physically. Yet it was not these qualities

alone which the men who climbed with Mallory remembered in later years; quite as important to them was the way in which he felt and spoke and wrote about mountaineering.

It is for this, and for the part that he played in the unfolding drama of Everest, that he ranks with such men as Whymper and Mummery and Collie, and his story is therefore rather quieter than those of the more flamboyant characters who climbed in a dozen ranges of the world throughout a long life.

Mallory's climbing record is, in fact, a good deal different from what is often thought. He had eight shortish seasons in the Alps, two of them as a youth; he visited Wales, and occasionally the Lakes, over a period of about fifteen years. And he went to Everest three times.

Yet for this, and for what he wrote about the influence of mountains on man, he will always be remembered. The shortness of his record does, in fact, make his influence even more remarkable.

This was due, in part of course, to the fact that Mallory himself was an exceptional character; it was also due to the fact that he was lucky in having been born—in Mobberley, Cheshire, where his father was rector—at just the right moment.

To realize this, it is necessary to understand what was happening in Britain and in the Alps during the years that followed Mallory's birth in 1886.

In that year a young barrister named Walter Parry Haskett-Smith climbed a seventy-foot pinnacle in the

Lake District known as the Napes Needle, an event which is frequently taken as marking the beginning of rock-climbing in Britain. Others followed Haskett-Smith, on the crags which rise around Wasdale Head, in the mountains of Snowdonia, and in many parts of Scotland. Until that period the climbing that had been done in Britain consisted mainly of snow-work carried out during the Christmas or Easter holidays by men who normally climbed only in the Alps. It was regarded as pleasant, amusing, but not very serious practice for 'real' mountaineering in the Alps, and the men who enjoyed it rarely felt that any genuine climbing could be found in Britain. This attitude was drastically altered by the developments that followed the climbs of Haskett-Smith and his friends in the 1880's. They tackled the great crags and rock-faces of Scafell, the Pillar Rock, and the Napes Ridges in the Lakes; of Lliwedd, Tryfaen and the Glyders in North Wales and, somewhat later, the rock-faces of the Cuillin in Skye. In all these areas, they found that the rocks, though only hundreds of feet in height instead of thousands, as they were on the Continent, could provide problems and excitements of their own. There were no glaciers in Britain, no ice-work or snow-work as difficult as that which could be found in the Alps; but when it came to the great chimneys, gullies and slabs which the rocks themselves provided—well, sport could be found there quite as good as anything offered by Switzerland, France or Italy.

This development of rock-climbing in Britain continued while Mallory was growing up, and by the time that he reached manhood, its first stage—the gully epoch as it is now called—was already ending. The pioneers such as Haskett-Smith had tackled first of all the deep dark gullies which split the rock-faces; then, about the turn of the century, this concentration on the gullies had become less intense. Instead, men began to look for new routes up the slabs and ridges which lay between the gullies. The change took place over a number of years, and it began at slightly different times in the Lakes, in Wales and in Scotland—a country where mountain-climbing as a sport was by this time firmly established. But it was, in general, this newly discovered rock-world of unconfined ridges and airy slabs into which Mallory stepped when he was first drawn to mountaineering. It was a world whose particular type of climbing was well suited to Mallory, both physically and mentally; physically because it demanded balance rather than brawn; mentally, because the sense of freedom given by the ridges and slabs accorded more with Mallory's outlook than the cribbed and confined atmosphere of the great and frequently gloomy gullies.

In the Alps, also, mountaineering had reached a stage soon after the turn of the century which was peculiarly suitable for the deployment of Mallory's particular qualities.

It will be remembered that during the 1890's Collie, together with such companions as Geoffrey

Hastings, A. F. Mummery and Cecil Slingsby, had made a series of remarkable climbs in the Alps. Some of these had been not only guideless climbs but also first ascents; in other words, they showed that under favourable conditions amateur climbers could carry out important major ascents on their own initiative—a development which not only ‘set them free’ from guides but gave them a new mountaineering stature of their own. This is not, of course, to suggest that the great climbers of the past had been—in anything but the literal sense—‘tied’ to their guides; but to the sensitive climber the guide had inevitably formed a screen interposed between himself and the mountain, subtly altering the relationship between them. It was the final removal of this screen which the guideless exploits of the 1890’s brought about. Just as it is said that ‘every Mount Everest expedition stands on the shoulders of its predecessors’, so do mountaineers draw in the experience of the men who have climbed before them; they absorb it, transmute it in a way, and then carry the story of mountaineering another few steps forward. If one considers this for a moment, it will be seen that the first decade of the twentieth century obviously held out exciting possibilities in the Alps. Once again, it was a ‘climate’ ideally suited to Mallory’s individual feelings and abilities.

What sort of young man was it, one must now ask, who in the early 1900’s stood on the threshold of such great things? And how was he introduced to the exciting world of mountain adventure?

When, in 1900, Mallory won a scholarship to Winchester from his preparatory school in Eastbourne, he was an unusual boy in one striking way—he was rather serious and yet, at the same time, he had a facility for out-of-the-ordinary, venturesome escapades. He climbed trees, walls, iron structures and buildings—including his father's church—when other boys would have been expending their energy on the playing field. He was moderately good, though not outstanding, in the regular round of organized games; he was a strong walker, a fine gymnast and, as it turned out later, a fine shot, being a member of the Winchester team that won the Ashburton Shield at Bisley in 1904.

Moreover, and it was this which perhaps really singled him out from among his companions, he was even then the sort of youth around whom legends grow. In later life there was the story of how he had made a new and difficult route on Lliwedd, one of the most famous of Welsh cliffs, by going back for a lost pipe and casually taking what appeared to him to be the most obvious way back to the ledge where he had left it. And, years after that, there went around the world the story of the answer he had given to the U.S. journalist who had asked Mallory why men wanted to climb Everest. 'Because it is there,' was his answer. Such things happened to other men, but when they happened to Mallory they somehow became memorable.

He was a slim, startlingly good-looking youth—so much so that he was noticed on this account alone

wherever he went, and had, as a result, to stand a good deal of leg-pulling because of it.

Looking back at the long list of men who have made great mountaineers, one can see that Mallory had many of the inbuilt qualities needed. He was active yet not over-attracted to team-games. Whatever exercise he took, he wished to be governed, not by an arbitrary set of rules, but by his own personal initiative and decision. He must have seemed, as indeed he was, a potential convert to mountaineering, and it is not surprising that he was noticed as such, at Winchester, by a very remarkable schoolmaster. This was Robert Lock Graham Irving, a man only nine years older than Mallory and one who was to play a formative part in the latter's life.

Irving was only twenty-three when Mallory went to Winchester but he was an enthusiastic mountaineer. In 1904 the companion with whom he normally climbed died suddenly, and Irving found that he had no one with whom to share his usual Alpine holiday. Cost ruled out the hiring of a guide for more than a few days; prudence ruled out the practice of climbing alone. To solve the problem, he decided on a revolutionary course, and one that was subsequently criticized severely by certain members of the Alpine Club, to which he belonged. Irving decided to take abroad with him, and to introduce to the Alps, young men whom he looked upon as recruits to the great sport of mountaineering—a practice which he continued for a number of years, and whose early trials and

tribulations he described in a famous paper in the *Alpine Journal*, 'Five Years with Recruits'.

Of the first two of these, one was Harry Gibson, a young man who was killed in the First World War, and of whom Irving wrote that 'he climbed whenever his work and restricted means allowed, and he climbed anything with pleasure; boulders, sea-rocks, quarries, buildings, sacred and profane, contributed to satisfy his appetite'; the second was Mallory, a friendly gymnastic rival of Gibson. The reaction of the two young men, aged about seventeen or eighteen, to the news that they could accept Irving's offer, shows what they were like. 'It was some time later', Irving subsequently wrote, 'that I heard the two had gone to practise on the ruins of Wolvesey Palace opposite college, and that a leap of several yards had just prevented an accident due to the partial collapse of one of the walls.'

Mallory's experiences in that summer of 1904 were to influence all the rest of his life. When he went to the Alps with Irving and Gibson he had never before seen a high peak. His knowledge of mountaineering technique consisted entirely of the 'coaching' he had gained from Irving. He knew nothing of the background of climbing, knew of no reason why the sport should attract him more than any other kind of adventurous activity. Yet when he came back home after those first few weeks in the Alps, he realized that climbing mountains gave him a fresh and unexpected satisfaction that nothing else quite equalled.

The party had, in all conscience, done enough to awaken ambition and the desire for further adventures—reaching to within 600 ft. of the top of the 12,000-ft. Velan on their first day out from England as a start. After that, they had climbed the Grand Combin, taken the high-level route from Chanrion to Zermatt, traversed Monte Rosa, and then, Irving and Mallory alone this time, traversed Mont Blanc. All guideless and all within a week or so of Mallory's first sight of the Alps!

The following year Mallory went out to the Alps with Irving once again, this time with two other Winchester boys, H. E. G. Tyndale, who was later to become the editor of the *Alpine Journal*, and Guy Bullock, a young man with whom he was to accomplish great things during the reconnaissance of Mount Everest some sixteen years later. It was a bigger party on this occasion than on the previous year, and there were more protests about the risks of taking young guideless parties up such peaks as Mont Collon and the Dent Blanche. However, the protests were ignored or evaded, Mallory's experience was increased, and he returned to England even more certain than before that for him mountain-climbing was something more than a mere sport.

From this point forward, Mallory's mind was made up. Whatever else he became, however he would earn his living, he would at least dedicate himself to climbing mountains with all the competence that training and practice and effort could muster.

Looking back on his life today, it seems as if there were certain stages in his mountaineering career; each one fell into place as a preparation for the next; each was another step—though he did not know it in these early days—which was to lead to those upper slopes of Everest on which men can almost reach out and touch the deep blue cold of outer space.

First came the slow building-up of rock-climbing experience on the hills of Britain; after this, the growth of experience in the Alps until, at the age of about twenty-five, Mallory had become one of the finest all-round climbers living. There was to be a brief period of unrestrained joy in the Alps; and then, the goal towards which all this preparation seemed to have been leading, the attempts on Everest, the highest mountain in the world.

After he returned from his second visit to the Alps, Mallory went up to Cambridge, an event which brought him into contact with a mountain brotherhood quite as exciting as that which Irving had built up with his Winchester pupils. This was Geoffrey Winthrop Young's Pen-y-Pass group, a galaxy of young men, mainly from the universities, who joined him in Wales each Easter and Christmas, and who between them played an important part in the development of Welsh mountaineering.

For Mallory there then began the halcyon years—eight splendid years during which his great moments of enjoyment were either on the British hills or in the Alps, during which he steadily polished his technique

as a climber, and during which he was to work out the philosophy of climbing that he embodied in one long article for the *Climbers' Club Journal*.

In Wales he stayed sometimes at Pen-y-Pass, the little inn on the crest of the Llanberis Pass, sometimes in the neighbouring Ogwen Valley, travelling round to Snowdon by bicycle or by dog-cart, or climbing with his companions on the Glyders or the Carneddls. Sometimes he made longer sorties to the hills beyond Snowdon where he helped to discover the great crags of Cwn Silin.

Yet it was to Lliwedd that he turned perhaps most frequently. This twin-headed peak is one of the 'nails' in the Snowdon Horseshoe, the fine high-level walk and scramble that is one of the glories of the district. Rising in great percipices some 800 ft. from the scree above the shores of Llyn Llydaw, Lliwedd has two great sweeps of cliff which are, as someone has said, the finest both to look at and to look from of any in Wales. They have, also, an indefinable mountain quality which gives them a character quite different from that of any other cliff in Wales. Here Mallory came regularly, repeating all the old routes of the pioneers and making more than one new route of his own.

And in 1909 there came his next glimpse of the Alps, this time with Geoffrey Young and another young climber called Donald Robertson. The three of them made a number of first-class climbs, some with guides and some without—the latter including a new

ascent of the south-east ridge of the Nesthorn, a climb on which Mallory had the only serious fall of his life.

He was leading up badly iced rocks, with Young some fifteen or twenty feet below him. The holds were insufficient for the delicate move he had to make, and without warning he suddenly fell back and out. 'So much did the wall, to which he had clung so long, overhang that from the instant he lost hold he touched nothing until the rope stopped him in mid-air over the glacier, out of sight.' But the rope, magnificently belayed by Young, took the weight of the forty-foot fall. A call from below signified that all was well, and a few moments afterwards Mallory was to be seen moving carefully but imperturbably up to his second. 'He had not even let go of his axe during the fall', commented Young.

By 1912 Mallory had reached his full stature as a mountaineer. As a rock-climber he was the equal of such experts as Archer-Thomson, who climbed mainly in Wales, and Botterill and Herford, who climbed mainly in the Lakes—a man who, as it was said of another famous mountaineer, could 'stand on a small rugosity in the midst of infinite space and feel quite comfortable'. In the Alps, he had followed his climbs with Geoffrey Young by a poorish season in which he had been handicapped by a youngster whom he was introducing to mountaineering, but who had no heart for the business, and by a long tour in 1911 with Tynedale and Irving. During this he had once again made a number of remarkable guideless climbs, one of the



I NORMAN COLLIE



Royal Geographical Society

Left to right Major H T Morshead, GEORGE LEIGH-MALLORY, T H Somervell and General E F Norton, during the 1922 Everest expedition

best being the ascent of Mont Blanc from the Col du Géant by the eastern buttress of Mont Maudit—the first guideless ascent.

And he had, by this time, worked out the ideas which he expounded in a remarkable essay, 'The Mountaineer as Artist', published in the *Climbers' Club Journal*. In this, he did something more than ask the age-old question 'Why go climbing?' In addition he asked what it was that set mountaineering in a class apart from other sports and pastimes. Put briefly, his answer was that a man could express himself in mountaineering in much the same way as he could in painting or music or any of the other arts. The essay was a delicately phrased metaphysical argument in which Mallory compared a day in the Alps with a great symphony, but the nub of it came in the last two sentences in which he summed up the ideas of climbers such as himself. 'They claim', he wrote, 'that something sublime is the essence of mountaineering. They can compare the call of the hills to the melody of wonderful music, and the comparison is not ridiculous.'

Mallory's defence of mountaineering—for it was nothing less—was published in March 1914: only a few months remained before the outbreak of the First World War, so that one is almost into the 1920's before the main threads of his story are taken up again.

On going down from Cambridge, he had become for a short while a master at Dartmouth, and had then been appointed an assistant master at Charterhouse.

He married a few months before the outbreak of war, subsequently joined the Royal Artillery, and for years was able to visit the mountains only during occasional leaves—on one of which he used five days to visit Skye where he made a first ascent on the cliffs of Sron na Ciche which is still known as Mallory's Climb. He went to the Western Front in the summer of 1916 and for the next few months lived the ordinary life of a subaltern. Then, as he spoke excellent French, he was attached as a Liaison Officer to a French artillery unit elsewhere at the front.

After the war he returned to Lliwedd, where together with his wife and two old friends he made the Garter Traverse on Lliwedd. And, in the summer of 1919, he was back in the Alps once again. In the trenches of France he had often thought of them; like men in a later war, he had been sustained by the thought of all the fine experiences that the mountains had given him.

Now, after the war, he realized how the years of training had paid. For he was no longer only the tactician, expert with the detail of rock, snow and ice; now he could deal with what one can in no fanciful way call the higher strategy of mountaineering.

While this newly realized confidence gave him an immense satisfaction, in many other ways Mallory was a dissatisfied man during these years immediately after the end of the war; dissatisfied with his job of teaching, worried about what we would now call 'current events', and not at all sure that he was doing

the task for which he had been cut out. He thought of giving up his post at Charterhouse. He became greatly concerned with 'the troubles' in Ireland, and in the autumn of 1920 went himself to see what the position there really was like—walking with rucksack on back throughout the country where battery and barricade and sudden death in the night was the common occurrence.

He was unsettled, wondering, not quite certain of what he wanted to do next. And it was then that there came the offer that was to guide his course as long as life lasted. It is summed up in the one word—Everest.

Today it may seem a little strange that the first attempts to climb Mount Everest were made no less than seventy years after an Indian mathematician had rushed into the office of his Chief with the famous words: 'Sir, I have discovered the highest mountain in the world.' Yet when Mount Everest, as it was subsequently called in honour of Sir George Everest, Surveyor-General of India, was first discovered, mountaineering as a sport had hardly been born. Moreover, for nearly half a century there was great doubt that men could breathe and live in the rarefied air 29,002 ft. above sea level—the height which was the average of six separate observations.

It was not only these facts which kept men away from Everest for so long. The mountain rises on the frontier between Tibet and Nepal, two states which have for centuries discouraged even individual

travellers, let alone the numbers involved in a major mountaineering expedition. For years, therefore, no one even thought of attempting to climb Everest. Then, in 1893, Captain (later Brigadier-General) Bruce, the Indian Army officer who had travelled and climbed extensively in the Himalaya, and who was to aid Mummery and Collie two years later, suggested to another Himalayan explorer, Francis (later Sir Francis) Younghusband, that they should visit the mountain. They failed to get permission to enter Tibet—for long thought to offer the best means of approach—and subsequent attempts proved no more successful. In 1907, the fiftieth anniversary of the Alpine Club's foundation, efforts to send an expedition to the mountains were strongly supported by Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, but once again permission was refused.

It was only in 1920 that another determined effort was made, this time by the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club; and, in January 1921, permission for an expedition to approach Mount Everest was finally obtained from the Tibetan Government.

It was inevitable that Mallory should be invited to join the expedition; it was by no means inevitable that he would accept. He knew, of course, of the plans that were being made long before they were finally approved, and he must have asked himself scores of times what his actions should be. He was thinking of leaving Charterhouse, it is true, but he was now

thirty-five. The prospect of going to Everest was an exciting one, but it meant that he would be out of the country for many, many months, and the problem of what to do when he returned would still be unsolved; he was a good lecturer, admittedly, but it cannot be imagined that joining the expedition 'led anywhere' in the usual sense of the phrase.

At first he had regarded the idea as something almost too fantastic to be considered seriously. But his wife, who might so well have tried to dissuade him from going, helped to convince him that if the opportunity came it should be grasped with both hands.

Finally, early in February 1921, the formal offer was made—by Sir Francis Younghusband, then President of the Royal Geographical Society, and Captain Farrar, a former President of the Alpine Club. Mallory lunched with them and Harold Raeburn, the veteran Scottish mountaineer, who had already joined the expedition, and accepted the offer.

'It seems rather a momentous step altogether,' he wrote to Geoffrey Young, 'with a new job to find when I come back, but it will not be a bad thing to give up the settled ease of this present life.'

That first Everest reconnaissance, which left England later in the year, was to be more momentous for Mallory than he probably imagined when he accepted the offer, for the major share of the vital exploratory work on the mountain was to fall on his shoulders.

At that date, little was known about the approaches

to Everest, so that scientists as well as mountaineers were members of the reconnoitring party. The main task lay with the climbing party, however, and it does not seem to have been as easy to form as might have been expected. Some men, such as Collie, who was a member of the Everest Committee, were past their prime; many of Britain's finest climbers had been killed in the war. When complete, the climbing party consisted, in fact, of only four men—a number which Mallory correctly estimated to allow no margin for reserve, or for the mishaps that occur to even the best-organized expeditions. The two veterans of the party were Dr. A. M. Kellas, a London chemist who had immense experience of Himalayan travel and who in a single year had made no fewer than ten first ascents of 20,000-ft. peaks, and Harold Raeburn. Both of these men were getting on in years, and it was not expected that they would go really high on the mountain; even when the party left Britain it was realized that an important part of the work would be carried out by Mallory and his companion Guy Bullock—the same Bullock with whom he had climbed in the Alps sixteen years previously. As it turned out, Fate was to push them even further into the forefront of events. For as the expedition wound its slow way across the high plateau of Tibet it was to suffer first a setback and then a tragedy. Raeburn was taken ill and for a lengthy period had to withdraw from active participation. Then Dr. Kellas, the man who knew more about the Himalaya than any of his companions, died from a

severe bout of enteritis which no one had expected would prove fatal—ironically enough, the day before they came within sight of Everest for the first time.

All this gave Mallory the opportunity for which he seems to have been destined. Whatever misgivings he may have retained—and in spite of the tremendous adventure on which he had embarked, there must still have been some misgivings—all doubts dropped away when he realized that on him, almost alone, was falling the task of finding a way to the summit of the highest mountain in the world.

The day after Kellas's death, Mallory and Bullock set out from camp in the early morning and plodded up the slopes behind the tents, knowing that they must at last be within sight of Everest. They tramped steadily upwards for about 1,000 ft., and then stopped and turned.

'There was no mistaking the two great peaks in the west', Mallory wrote later. 'That to the left must be Makalu, grey, severe, and yet distinctly graceful, and the other away to the right—who could doubt its identity? It was a prodigious white fang excrescent from the jaw of the world. We saw Mount Everest not quite sharply defined on account of a slight haze in that direction; this circumstance added a touch of mystery and grandeur; we were satisfied that the highest of mountains would not disappoint us.' From that moment a new personal note seems to have entered into the adventure.

As man's knowledge of Everest and its problems increased during the following months, so did Mallory's feeling for the mountain also change, becoming more complex so that he alternately loved and loathed it. Somehow it helped to increase his mental stature so that to his friends he became a living illustration of his own theory that mountains can alter a man's whole way of looking at life. The sheer physical problems of adaptation to the great heights of the Himalaya and of long periods of expedition life appear to have surprised, and at times depressed, him. The vast splendour of the Himalayan scene—splendour but not necessarily beauty, for in that he ranked the Alps far higher than the Himalaya—fascinated him, reviving about Everest a dormant wish that, after all, it should *not* be climbed. And the death of seven porters, swept away in an avalanche in 1922, made him wonder, for the first time perhaps, whether mountaineering—at least of this sort—was not more like war than sport. With your own life, he felt, you could at least estimate fairly whether the game was worth the candle; here the matter was different.

And, entwined with all these complex feelings, was the delight that he, rather than anyone else, had been picked by circumstances for this major role of finding the key to Everest—rather as Kipling's 'Explorer' believed that 'Anybody might have found it, but—His Whisper came to Me!'

When the 1921 expedition finally set up headquarters at Tingri, a collection of houses north of

Everest, the first task entrusted to Mallory and Bullock—now the only two fit members of the climbing party—was to find a practicable way on to the upper slopes of the mountain.

Today we know what Everest looks like. The great north face, with the north-east ridge sweeping down and round and down again to the North Col, and the steeper north-west ridge on the right, is a sight that has been made familiar to millions through photographs and films. In 1921 no one had more than the vaguest idea of what this great northern side of the mountain was like; moreover, no one even knew which of the vast glacier-filled valleys radiating out from the central mass of Everest led most directly into the heart of the mountain massif.

At Tingri, the expedition was told that due south there lay the opening of a narrow valley at the beginning of which stood the Rongbuk Monastery. Beyond that, the valley ran upwards towards Everest itself. It was up this valley that Mallory and Bullock, accompanied by sixteen porters and a *sirdar*, set off on their first explorations, and from it that they got their first near-view of the great north face of the mountain. The track suddenly topped a little rise and the two men paused, as Mallory wrote later, 'in sheer astonishment'.

The description of what they saw is worth quoting at length not only because it gives a fine impression of Everest, but because, by it, one can gain some idea of how Mallory regarded the mountain.

‘Perhaps we had half expected to see Mount Everest at this moment’, he wrote. ‘In the back of my mind were a host of questions about it clamouring for an answer. But the sight of it now banished every thought. We forgot the stony wastes and regrets for other beauties. We asked no questions and made no comment, but simply looked.

‘It is perhaps because Everest presented itself so dramatically on this occasion that I find the Northern aspect more particularly imagined in my mind, when I recall the mountain. But in any case this aspect has a special significance. The Rongbuk Valley is well constructed to show off the peak at its head; for about twenty miles it is extraordinarily straight, and in that distance rises only 4,000 ft., the glacier, which is ten miles long, no more steeply than the rest. In consequence of this arrangement one has only to be raised very slightly above the bed of the valley to see it almost as a flat way up to the very head of the glacier from which the cliffs of Everest spring. To the place where Everest stands one looks along rather than up. The glacier is prostrate, not a part of the mountain; not even a pediment; merely a floor footing the high walls. At the head of the valley and above the glacier Everest rises not so much a peak as a prodigious mountain-mass. There is no complication for the eye. The highest of the world’s great mountains, it seems, has to make but a single gesture of magnificence to be lord of all, vast in unchallenged and isolated supremacy. To the discerning eye other

mountains are visible, giants between 23,000 and 26,000 ft. high. Not one of these slenderer heads reaches their chief's shoulder; beside Everest they escape notice—such is the pre-eminence of the greatest.'

As they approached nearer to this immense mountain wall in front of them, Mallory and Bullock began to realize, as no one had realized before, the size of the problems that Everest held out to be solved. The western ridge of the mountain, sloping down to the right from the summit as they looked at it, appeared to be too difficult to tackle. There remained the north-east ridge, whose angle was less and which dropped many thousands of feet to a snowy col before rising again to what later became known as the North Peak. This col, Mallory instinctively realized, was the key to any possible ascent of Everest from the north, and it was essential that Bullock and he should gain some vantage-point from which a careful study of the slopes leading to it could be made.

They continued up the glacier, giving their porters instruction in snow- and ice-work when opportunity offered, and hoping that when the slopes leading to the North Col came into view they would not be too difficult.

Then, when they finally reached the head of the glacier and looked up at the slopes, they knew that no route could be made that way. The steep and uninviting snow slopes might have been climbed by such men as Mallory and Bullock but they were no place

for the strings of porters who would be needed to help set up camp on the Col itself—and, as it later turned out, the other higher camps which would have to be pitched between the Col and the summit.

The North Col, Mallory realized, would have to be reached from the other side—and reaching 'the other side' in this case involved returning down the Rongbuk Glacier and valley to Tingri, and then making an immense detour eastwards around the outlying spurs of Everest.

The detour was made. The expedition moved *en masse* to a hamlet called Kharta in the upper valley of the River Arun. And, once again, Mallory and Bullock set off on their explorations. This time, making their way up a tributary valley that led westwards towards Everest, they finally reached a little col 22,000 ft. high, and looked across a great snow-basin to relatively easy slopes that rose—almost unbelievably, it seemed—to the North Col itself.

So they found that the North Col could be reached from the east. Almost at the same time, the surveyors of the party showed that the snow-basin across which Mallory and Bullock had looked from their newly found col led down into the Rongbuk Glacier.

It was already late in the season, and to return to the Rongbuk area—which everyone now realized would provide the best way up to the North Col—would take valuable time. So a party followed Mallory's route up to the new col, which they named the Lhakpa La, down on to the snow-basin, the head, as it

turned out, of what was later called the East Rongbuk Glacier, and then up to the North Col.

Here, after weeks of work, Mallory found his reward, looking up the long arête which led to the summit. 'If ever we had doubted whether the arête was accessible, it was impossible to doubt any longer', he wrote later. 'For a long way up those easy rock and snow slopes was neither danger nor difficulty. But at present there was wind. Even where we stood under the lee of a little ice-cliff it came in fierce gusts at frequent intervals, blowing up the powdery snow in a suffocating tourbillion. On the col beyond it was blowing a gale. And higher was a more fearful sight. The powdery fresh snow on the great face of Everest was being swept along in unbroken spindrift and the very ridge where our route lay was marked out to receive its unmitigated fury. We could see the blown snow deflected upwards for a moment where the wind met the ridge, only to rush violently down in a frightful blizzard on the leeward side. To see, in fact, was enough; the wind had settled the question; it would have been folly to go on.'

A few weeks later the party was on its way back to England.

Mallory's exultation at the idea of tackling the highest mountain in the world was now conditioned by his knowledge of the great problems involved. The task would need at least eight first-rate climbers, he wrote to a friend, and he did not think that they could be found. He, of course, had been asked to take part in

the next expedition, already arranged for the following year. And, he suggested, he would not accept unless forced into it—a form of whistling to keep to his resolution, one feels, for at heart he must have known that he *had* to go.

Back in England he was immediately submerged in work on the magnificent book that was finally published, *Mount Everest, The Reconnaissance, 1921*, an account of the expedition to which Mallory contributed the chapters dealing with the actual climbing; in lecturing on the work of the expedition—and, of course, in preparing for the next one.

Three highlights stand out from the story of the 1922 expedition—the first real attempt to climb Everest rather than to find the best route on to its upper slopes. One was the growing appreciation of the difficulties above the North Col, difficulties not only of the actual rocks—although these were later found to be greater than had been anticipated—but of weather and of snow conditions; and, perhaps above all else, difficulties which were imposed by life in such rarefied air and which the comparatively primitive oxygen equipment of the time only partially overcame. The second highlight is linked with the first—the ascent of four climbers to within 2,000 ft. of the summit, and Mallory's action in saving the party from disaster on the descent.

Here Mallory showed, in one brilliant flash, his full quality as a mountaineer. All the long work and training, all the climbs on Lliwedd and the greater climbs

in the Alps, all these would have been worth while had they led to nothing more than the reaction, instinctive by this time, which in a moment of great peril held four men from disaster. This, indeed, was Ithuriel's Hour, when

*. . . the sum of all our past,
Act, habit, thought and passion, shall be cast
In one addition, be it more or less,
And as that reading runs so shall we do*

And, finally, there was the death of seven porters in an avalanche, an event which caused Mallory to examine, perhaps more deeply than he ever had before, his theory of the part that mountaineering should play in human life.

The 1922 Everest expedition went out under the leadership of Brigadier-General the Hon. C. G. Bruce, the same Bruce who nearly thirty years earlier had suggested that Younghusband and he should try to climb the mountain. Bullock had returned to his work in the Consular Service, but Mallory was supported on this occasion by such veteran mountaineers as Captain E. L. Strutt, Tom Longstaff who had tremendous Himalayan experience, E. F. Norton, G. I. Finch, and T. H. Somervell, as well as by C. G. Crawford, H. T. Morshead and Geoffrey Bruce, the latter a cousin of the expedition's leader.

This time the party took oxygen, Captain Finch being its leading advocate. What appeared to be a reasonable approach to the upper slopes was known,

and Mallory, as well as most other members of the party, ranked the chances of the expedition fairly high.

So far as he was concerned, the feeling that this time Everest *would* be climbed probably had something to do with his joining the expedition. The negotiations to obtain permission to enter Tibet, the accumulation of supplies and of a small army of men and animals—all so very different from the work of a normal mountaineering enterprise—had tended to turn the expedition into something that many climbers regarded as unhealthy even if inevitable.

This time, the North Col was approached by the East Rongbuk Glacier. The slopes leading up to it were more difficult than they had been the previous year, and under Mallory's guidance two fixed ropes were left for the use of the porters who finally helped to establish Camp IV on the Col itself. From here Mallory, together with Somervell, Norton, Morshead and nine Sherpas, set out on the morning of 20 May. The North Col was about 23,000 ft. high, leaving 6,000 ft. to the summit; they hoped to halve this distance on the first day, so that after setting up another camp at about 26,000 ft., they would have only some 3,000 ft. to cover in their final assault on the summit. The going was harder than they had anticipated, and they finally pitched their tents at about 25,000 ft. before starting the Sherpas off down the mountain towards the North Col.

If any party of men in 1922 *could* have covered that 4,000 ft. to the top of Everest and returned in a single

day, it would probably have consisted of Mallory, Somervell, Norton and Morshead; only later, during the 1930's, when one expedition after another was repulsed on that final stretch, did mountaineers realize to what extent they had underrated the last few thousand feet. What the Americans might call the logistics of the situation had, in fact, doomed the party to failure before it set out from Camp V. Almost immediately Morshead found that he was too ill to continue, and the other three carried on upwards while he retraced his steps to the camp.

'It was our intention naturally in setting out this day to reach the summit of Mount Everest', Mallory wrote later. 'Provided we were not stopped by a mountaineering difficulty, and that was unlikely, the fate of our Expedition would depend on two factors, time and speed.' Both factors were against the party, for the weather had prevented them from leaving camp as early as they had hoped, and fresh snow, lying from four to eight inches deep on the rock ledges, reduced their speed to about 400 ft. an hour.

They had agreed that they would have to turn back at 2.30, wherever they were at that hour, and when at 2.15 they were forced to halt on slightly easier ground, still some 2,000 ft. below the summit, they realized that they had shot their bolt. Reluctantly but inevitably they turned back. In an hour and a half they reached Camp V where they picked up Morshead and continued down towards the camp on the North Col. The snow that had fallen a few hours earlier altered

the appearance of the ground, and they followed a line slightly different from that of their ascent. The ground here was not exactly difficult, but the slope was steep enough to call for caution. Fresh snow had to be cleared away from some of the rocks, and in other places steps had to be cut. It was not the place for a slip: below them the steepening ground curled over into the precipices of the great north face. It was here that disaster stretched out its hand to touch them.

The last man bar one on the rope suddenly slipped. The last man was himself moving as the jerk came on him, and he was pulled from his steps. The combined weight of the two of them dragged off the next man. So far, and the story reads like a grey shadow of the Matterhorn disaster nearly sixty years before.

Yet the first sound of trouble, the unwonted scrape of nail on rock, had brought from Mallory, who was leading, a reflex action. Without knowing what was happening behind, without having time to turn, he struck the pick of his axe into the snow, hitched the rope round it, and leaned into the slope so as to hold the belay in position.

'In the still moment of suspense before the matter must be put to the test nothing further could be done to prevent a disaster one way or the other', he wrote later. 'The rope suddenly tightened and tugged at the axe-head. It gave a little as it gripped the metal like a hawser on a bollard. The pick did not budge. Then the rope came taut between the moving figures, and the rope showed what it was worth.'

They had been within a hair's-breadth of tragedy; yet none of the party had been even injured, and they continued their way down to the North Col without further incident.

The second attempt to reach the summit was made shortly afterwards, with oxygen, by Bruce and Finch. They succeeded in reaching a height of about 27,300 ft.; then they, too, were forced back by lack of time.

All the members of the expedition then assembled at the Base Camp and held a council of war. Many of them were in bad shape, but it was decided that enough fit men could be mustered to mount a third attempt, and Mallory, Somervell and Crawford set off with fourteen porters to re-establish the camp on top of the North Col.

Much new snow had fallen, and on the snowfield below the steeper slopes they sank in up to their knees. Higher up they roped, the three white men going ahead to stamp out the track for the heavily laden porters. They continued upwards without incident for more than three hours, passing the steepest part of the route and reaching the gentler slopes beyond. They debated whether they should halt, but it was already early afternoon and they decided to push on. There was no wind, their feet sank silently into the soft snow, and only the sound of their heavy breathing could be heard.

'This stillness was suddenly disturbed', Mallory wrote later. 'We were startled by an ominous sound, sharp, arresting, violent, and yet somehow soft like an

explosion of untamped gunpowder. I had never before on a mountain heard such a sound; but all of us, I imagine, knew instinctively what it meant, as though we had been accustomed to hear it every day of our lives. In a moment I observed the surface of the snow broken and puckered where it had been even for a few yards to the right of me. I took two steps convulsively in this direction with some quick thought of getting nearer to the edge of the danger that threatened us. And then I began to move slowly downwards, inevitably carried on the whole moving surface by a force I was utterly powerless to resist.'

Within a moment, Mallory was overwhelmed by a wave of snow. As he was carried down he 'swam', following the textbook instructions as to what you must do when caught in an avalanche. In a few seconds he came to rest, easily freed himself, and found to his relief that the porter on his rope was, like himself, unhurt. Somervell and Crawford extricated themselves in the same way, while below, some 150 ft. away, one group of porters also appeared to be safe.

But nine of the others had been submerged by the sea of snow. As Mallory, Somervell, and Crawford hurried down to the place where the men had disappeared, they continued to hope. As they descended, they realized what had happened—the avalanche had carried the two lower 'ropes' over an ice-cliff and then buried them deep in the accumulated snow.

Desperately the survivors began to dig. One man

was discovered dead. Another was still breathing. More bodies were found. Then, incredibly, one man who had been buried for forty minutes was found alive and unharmed.

Seven porters had been killed. Mallory knew, of course, that he was in no way to blame. Yet he was not the sort of man to take the easy options of life; he had been the most experienced mountaineer in the party and in letters which he subsequently wrote to friends he revealed how strongly he felt that he—in spite of the inevitability of the accident—should take whatever responsibility there was.

The accident put an end to all activity on the mountain, and by the end of the year Mallory was back in Britain. As before, it was he who played the leading part in the lecture tours that were arranged—partly because of his record on the mountain itself, partly because he was a confident and able speaker.

And, as 1923 passed, there came the inevitable question which he alone could answer—would he join the next expedition, already being planned for 1924?

The position was very different for Mallory from what it had been on either of the two previous occasions. His feelings on what one can only call the 'rightness' of climbing Everest had developed; he still felt deeply about the deaths of the seven porters on the slopes below the North Col. He had only recently taken up an appointment with the Board of Extra-Mural Studies at Cambridge, where his wife and children had now settled down. Yet he had more

experience of Everest than any other man living; in more ways than one, he must have felt, it was his duty to go.

In the end, he may have felt some inevitability about the matter, for he decided to let things run their own course; not to apply for a place in the expedition; but, if he was asked for and if the Board that employed him agreed that he should go, not to object.

He was, inevitably, asked for. The Board agreed. And by May Mallory was back on Everest.

This time the expedition had started with great hopes of success. Its members knew that the camps above the North Col had to be pushed higher than they had been before, and they had worked out a complex portering system to ensure that they got supplied. Yet at first everything went wrong. A series of serious blizzards delayed the programme. Illness took its toll, and it was only after an initial repulse that Mallory, Norton, and N. E. Odell finally succeeded in establishing the camp on the North Col.

From this camp two attempts to reach the summit were made. The first, by Mallory and Geoffrey Bruce, reached 25,000 ft., where they pitched Camp V; then three of the four available porters were found to be ill, the setting-up of a yet higher camp from which the final assault could be made was ruled out, and the attempt had to be abandoned. Then Norton and Somervell made their attempt. They managed to pitch Camp IV at 26,800 ft., little more than 2,000 ft. below the summit, and the following day set out at

dawn. Yet both men were sick, as well as exhausted by the great efforts that had had to be made already. Somervell reached about 28,000 ft., and Norton managed to climb on about another 100 ft. higher.

It would have been easy enough to call it a day. Every member of the expedition, in all conscience, had done more than anyone had a right to expect. Yet for Mallory the possibility of even another attempt still existed. It had to be made. Moreover, it had to be made with all the resources at hand, even oxygen whose use still seemed to him slightly unsporting.

As his companion for this attempt Mallory chose Andrew Irvine, the youngest member of the expedition. Irvine was only twenty-two, but he was, above all else, a 'good goer', and Mallory had great faith in his mental as well as physical ability to push on whatever the problem.

The two men went up to Camp V, sent a note down to Odell on the North Col by the Sherpa porters, telling him that the prospects appeared to be good, and the following day, 7 June, moved on up to Camp VI at 26,800 ft. On the same day Odell moved up to Camp V. Soon after his arrival Mallory's four porters arrived from Camp VI, bringing him a message which said that they had used but little oxygen to 27,000 ft., that the weather promised to be perfect for the morrow's climb. It added that Mallory was sorry the cooking stove had rolled down the mountain-side just as they were leaving Camp V—an occurrence

which meant a cold supper and breakfast for Odell.

Thus when day broke on the morning of 8 June, Mallory and Irvine were in their small two-man tent only some 3,200 ft. below the summit. Odell, down at Camp V, had agreed to take up additional supplies to Camp VI while the two men above made their attempt on the summit.

It was a clear morning, not unduly cold, and after a short breakfast Odell set out on his solitary climb. At times, swathes of mist began to form, while as the morning continued and he got higher, there were intermittent squalls of sleet and light snow. Above him, however, the mist looked lighter, and it seemed likely that Mallory and Irvine might be experiencing better weather.

Shortly before one o'clock, Odell had reached to within 800 ft. of Camp VI. He came to the top of a small steepish crag and, as he did so, the mists above him cleared and he looked up to see the whole summit ridge of Everest and the summit itself shining in the sun.

On the snow-slope which led to the last rock step bar one below the final summit pyramid, a tiny object could be seen moving. It steadily approached the rock step. A second figure followed, and the first then climbed to the top of the step. As Odell watched, the clouds thickened once again, hiding the next stage in the drama. 'I could not actually be certain that I saw the second figure join the first', Odell wrote later.

One thing immediately surprised Odell—that the

two men above him were so far behind their schedule. Mallory had estimated that they should have been at about the spot where Odell had seen them by ten o'clock. It was three hours past this, and they were still some way from the summit.

Odell reached Camp IV at two o'clock and, as a blizzard again set in, went outside the tent in the hope that he might be able to help direct Mallory and Irvine on to the camp should they be missing the way. As he got back to the tent, the weather cleared yet again and he looked up to see the whole upper face of the mountain covered with new snow sparkling in the sun. There were no signs of Mallory or Irvine.

There was room for only two men in the little tent at Camp VI, and Odell had arranged with Mallory that he would return to the North Col when he had dumped the additional supplies he had brought up. Reluctantly, he left Camp VI at 4.30; the going was good, and he was down at the North Col in little more than two hours.

There, together with his companions, he inaugurated a constant watch on the upper slopes of the mountain. Until it was dark they hoped against hope that through their field-glasses they might see some sign of movement. After dark there was still a chance that they might see a distress flare which would help them to pinpoint the position of the two missing men. There was no sign, no signal.

The following morning they looked again, with the same results, and Odell decided to go up to Camp VI

yet again. Two porters went with him as far as Camp V and above that he continued on alone—under the circumstances one of the most outstanding efforts ever made on the mountain.

Camp VI was empty. It had obviously not been touched since Odell had left it two days previously. And although he spent two hours up above the tent, searching for traces of Mallory and Irvine on the vast expanse of crags and broken slabs that led away towards the summit, he must have realized that no hope remained.

What exactly happened to Mallory and Irvine is not known, and it is unlikely that it ever will be known. When the next expedition went to Everest in 1933 its members found, at a height of about 27,600 ft., an ice-axe that had been used by either Mallory or Irvine, probably Mallory. From the position in which it was found, it seemed unlikely that it had slid there; more probably, it marked the scene of a slip by one of the two men, a slip which one must assume took them down the great northern face of the mountain.

Whether or not Mallory and Irvine reached the top of Everest is a riddle that is unlikely ever to be answered. Any traces which they might have left on the summit would, of course, almost certainly have disappeared before Hillary and Tenzing finally reached the top by a different route in 1953.

As a postscript to the mystery Mallory would probably have preferred not a reasoned summary of the pros and cons of success, but the lines which he

wrote in France during the war, thinking back on the great climb which he had made on Mont Blanc with Tyndale and Irving.

‘One must conquer, achieve, get to the top; one must know the end to be convinced that one can win the end—to know there’s no dream that mustn’t be dared—Is this the summit, crowning the day? How cool and quiet! We’re not exultant; but delighted, joyful; soberly astonished. . . . Have we vanquished an enemy? None but ourselves. Have we gained success? that word means nothing here. Have we won a kingdom? No . . . and yes. We have achieved an ultimate satisfaction . . . fulfilled a destiny. . . . To struggle and to understand—never this last without the other; such is the law. . . .’

An unusual way, one may perhaps feel, to look at the great struggle that mountaineering can sometimes become. For Mallory, it was the only possible way.

V

GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG

MOST mountaineers are known best of all for what they have done—Whymper for his conquest of the Matterhorn, Mummery for the Grépon, Collie for his dedication to Skye, and Mallory for the thought and action that led to some unknown choice and example high on Everest. Others are known, in spite of their great achievements, quite equally for their beliefs. Geoffrey Winthrop Young is one of these.

He is known to most mountaineers as the founder of the Pen-y-Pass parties which from the early years of the century began to inject a new feeling into the precept and practice of climbing in Britain. He is known as the man who during the years preceding the First World War became the most accomplished of all those British climbers who made great new routes in the Alps, many of them routes that even in the different conditions of today are yet still great personal adventures. He is known as the man who triumphed over the loss of a leg in the First World War and who, incredibly to those who do not know the story, continued to climb with an artificial leg—ascending not only great Alpine peaks but also many of the

Welsh rock-routes which he had helped to pioneer some twenty years previously. He is known as the mountaineer who from 1905 onwards campaigned for an organization which would speak for mountaineers in Britain—and who was, therefore, the real father of the British Mountaineering Council which was founded in 1944.

All this is important, but it is in some ways only the skeletal achievement which has served as the basis of a belief that mountains and mountaineering have a part to play in raising a human being to full mental and physical stature.

It is this belief of which Geoffrey Young has been the leading exponent throughout the whole of his remarkable life—a belief expounded not only by example but by book, by lecture, and by poem. In this last word lies the clue. For Geoffrey Young was the first British climber who was also a poet; he was the first—as he is still almost the only one—who could evoke in words the real feeling of rock, snow and ice, and who could make the uninitiated aware of the delights of mountaineering, even though they did not share them. 'Mountains have been in all my life, and in different ways,' he has written. That he has been able to explain, so well, just why this is so, may well be ranked quite as important as his exceptional feats.

Whymper and Mummery, Collie and Mallory, had little trace of mountain-worship in their background. Each in his own way was considered if not abnormal at least slightly unconventional in his devotion to the

new sport which in each case dominated his life from manhood onwards.

With Geoffrey Young, the reverse was the case. His father, Sir George Young, had been a keen mountaineer in the early days of the sport, and with the almost legendary guide, Christian Almer, and Hereford George, the first editor of the *Alpine Journal*, had made the first ascent of the Jungfrau from the Wengern Alp in 1865. Geoffrey Young was, therefore, born into a world where mountains were accepted, and where the lack of any wish to climb them would have been considered inexplicable.

There was, however, no question of this. Born in 1876, he had clambered up to the summit of Tryfaen, that fine rock-pyramid in the Nant Ffrancon Pass, by the time he was fourteen, and in the next few years had begun finding his fleet-foot way up and across all the hills of Snowdonia. And it was on the summit of Tryfaen, during the same period, that he saw two roped figures emerge from one of the gullies, Tom and Roderick Williams, then completing the first genuine rock-climb made on the mountain and one of the first ever made in Wales.

It is difficult to imagine what the hills of North Wales must have been like for the young, imaginative and adventurous mountaineer more than half a century ago. During the previous twenty years many of the great Alpine climbers—C. E. Mathews, Horace Walker, the Pilkingtons, Clinton Dent, and Professor Tyndall, to name only a few of them—had come to

Wales during the winter months and had explored the snow gullies of Snowdon and the Glyders; a number of Alpine Club meets had been held at such places as Capel Curig; yet even by the end of the 1880's no development had taken place in Wales quite comparable with the growth of rock-climbing which was then spreading throughout the Lake District. Two routes had been made up the face of Lliwedd, the lovely twin-headed peak which rises in the Snowdon group, but elsewhere the rock precipices which today provide a whole galaxy of routes were completely untouched. There were, of course, no Youth Hostels. Transport was by foot, or by horse and cart. Knowledge of the hills could be gained not from guide-books, for these did not exist, but only from the Ordnance Survey maps and the information of friends.

From the 1890's onwards this sparsely populated Welsh landscape began to be visited in growing numbers by men such as the Williamses, Liverpool solicitors, Harold Hughes of Bangor and, above all, by J. M. Archer Thomson, a Llandudno schoolmaster. Between them, they brought rock-climbing to Wales, injecting into the more conservative Pen-y-Gwryd traditions the love of rock-climbing for its own sake.

It was of this newly created mountain community that Geoffrey Winthrop Young steadily became a part. He was tall, energetic and strikingly good-looking. He went to Wales, first of all during the long summer holidays, and, later, for shorter periods during the spring and the winter; his headquarters

were either Pen-y-Gwyrdd itself or Ogwen Cottage, the little grey building in the Ogwen Valley from which Archer Thomson and Harold Hughes sallied out in 1895 for their first ascent of the ice-glazed Devil's Kitchen, an ascent famous in the annals of Welsh climbing and accomplished with the help not of an ice-axe but of Mrs. Jones's kitchen chopper. By this time Young's experience of Welsh hills, Lake-land fells—and of the mountains of southern Ireland which he visited with his family on more than one occasion—had given him that freedom to move easily and safely on the heights which is one of the first things which the mountaineer must acquire. Now his thoughts turned from the obvious scrambling routes to be found on the ridges to climbs as the word is understood today.

“Climbs” were in fact to us pre-existing, but concealed, lines of possibility contrived by nature and by time up steep and unknown cliffs’, he wrote later. ‘It was our joy and privilege to seek them out, and to pursue them up, each according to his natural powers of lift and adhesion. I used to think that, very much as Michael Angelo saw his figures in being behind their veil of stone and hewed them out wholly or in part as statues, it was ours to envisage the climbs veiled in the rocks through the ages, and to follow them to completion; whereafter they remained as entities in view. Since nature, obviously, was unlikely to have contrived many of these accidental chains of human possibility on any single cliff, the thrill of finding a



Emile Gos, Lausanne

GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG
(right)
with H O Jones and Josef Knubel



Camera Press

SIR JOHN HUNT

“new climb”, which had been waiting there for us unknown through the aeons, was intense. Our talk about it afterwards, interminable and enthusiastic, was not, as it would be nowadays, about its abstract grades of difficulty or the human technique that its obstructions exacted, so much as of the natural features or configuration of the particular rock rift or rib.’

This was the poetic conception of rock-climbing, a conception wholly in keeping with the lithe figure that gained a growing reputation not only in Wales but in the Lakes, in Scotland, in the Alps, in fact wherever men met who loved mountains and talked of them often.

In the mid-1890's he left Marlborough, the school which can claim more than one great mountaineer, and went up to Cambridge. It was here that Geoffrey Young's enthusiasm for the art and craft of climbing broke out in a new and unexpected way. For centuries men had climbed into and out of college, a method of evading regulations which combined mental and physical exercise, and it was natural that in the 1890's many of those who did so should be ‘legitimate’ mountaineers—men who saw in the problems of pinnacle and parapet at least some physical resemblance to the rock-problems of real mountains. Young, however, carried the matter a step farther, writing and publishing—as a May Week joke—*The Roof-Climbers' Guide to Trinity*, the world's first guide to building-climbing as it might be called. It applied to

the sport the terms of rock-climbing that were coming into general use. It described, with apt quotations from the classics, many delectable climbs on the roofs of the college; it was illustrated by useful, informative sketches; and it included a masterly ground-plan by a climber who later became a well-known member of the House of Lords.

The publication of Young's little volume raised the problem of whether roofs were, in fact, 'out of bounds' in the proper sense of the word. A test case had to be prepared, and a party of three—including George Macaulay Trevelyan, the historian who later became Master of Trinity—solemnly gathered one morning outside the college, escorted by the enforcers of law and order. Then, in broad daylight, they carried out some of the climbs described in the book; and authority decided, after due consideration, that the roofs *were*, in fact, out of bounds.

The Roof-Climbers' Guide to Trinity, a little book now exceedingly difficult to obtain, was followed a few months later by a second privately printed volume from the same author. This was *Wall and Roof Climbing*—'a short outline of the history and literature, ancient and modern, and an account of the laws, methods, appliances, and phraseology peculiar to the art', and including appendices on such esoteric matters as tree-climbing and haystack-climbing. These books, however, were purely examples of *joie de vivre*, not intended to be taken seriously, illustrations of the fact that in some men thoughts would

always turn to the problems and intricacies of climbing wherever they might happen to be.

From Cambridge, Young went as Assistant Master to Eton in 1900. And, during the next few years there, developed his parties at Pen-y-Pass, a mountain institution that, except during the years of the First World War, was to last for more than a third of a century. Pen-y-Gwryd, the little inn which stands where the road from Capel Curig forks downhill to the Gwynant Valley and uphill to the crest of the Llanberis Pass, was the traditional home of Welsh mountaineering, and it was out of the meetings here that there grew the Climbers' Club, founded in 1898 for 'association or union among Mountaineers and the encouragement of Mountaineering'.

With the turn of the century three things happened. Pen-y-Gwryd fell on hard times, and its popularity as a centre waned. A mile up the road, at the crest of the Llanberis Pass and that much nearer the cliffs that rise from the great cwms of Snowdon, the little ale-house of Pen-y-Pass came into new hands and was developed as an hotel. And, simultaneously, the emphasis swung slowly from the winter scrambling of the older mountaineers to rock-climbing of a new order and on crags more easily reached from Pen-y-Pass.

It was to Pen-y-Pass, therefore, that Geoffrey Young would invite small groups of friends at Easter and Christmas, a community whose individual members might change but which retained for more than a

decade a certain corporate spirit and feeling. Here, during the years before the First World War, came all those men whose legendary names and feats are written so large across the Golden Age of Welsh mountaineering—Mallory himself, Hugh Rose Pope, H. V. Reade and many others. Between them, they built up not only the fine wealth of climbs, but also the Welsh tradition, of which the next generation was to be the inheritor. Young himself, most important, perhaps, as a stimulant to others, is especially known for two routes on the East Peak of Lliwedd—the Roof route and Solomon, the latter so named because it exactly bisects a rock feature known as the Quartz Babe.

The climbing community was in those days a very small one. Everyone knew everyone else, and the lack of guide-books ensured that information about new climbs could be imparted only to those able to use it properly. Many believed that any more detailed guide to the rocks was wrong. 'The mystery of the cliffs should, in their view,' Geoffrey Young has written, 'be preserved, so that others might enjoy their discovery equally. The clearer the description written of them, the more complete must be the disappearance of the fun of finding and of the mountaineering value of working out one's own route. It was only when they became convinced, like us, that we could no longer check the distribution of information, much of it misleading, that they became prepared to accept the only alternative left.'

The result was the production, for a Climbers' Club committee of which Young was a member, of the first of the Welsh guides, written by J. M. Archer Thomson—and, in the case of the first volume, A. W. Andrews—and dealing with the climbs on Lliwedd and those in the Ogwen Valley.

The Pen-y-Pass parties were important in Geoffrey Young's mountain life, but they filled only a portion of it. From the turn of the century he had played an increasingly important part in the discovery of new Alpine routes of a severity not hitherto attempted; and during the fourteen years that remained before the outbreak of the First World War, he established himself as the leader of a small band whose Alpine achievements made them different from ordinary men.

Young climbed whenever and wherever he could. Solving the mountain problem was merely part of the enjoyment, and there was little doubt even then that, like Mummery, he would still have wandered 'among the upper snows, lured by the silent mists and the red blaze of the setting sun, even though physical or other infirmity, even though in after aeons the sprouting of wings and other angelic appendages, may have sunk all thought of climbing and cragsmanship in the whelming past'.

Between 1900 and 1914 he tackled what were then *the most difficult climbs in the Alps*—notably the ridges of the Grandes Jorasses, the Brouillard Ridge on Mont Blanc, the Grépon by the Mer de Glace face, the south face of the Taschhorn and the western arête

of the Gspaltenhorn. All of these were more than merely first-class climbs—they took the level of accomplishment far beyond what more than the smallest handful of mountaineers could then hope to achieve. 'I myself in those years,' Young admitted later, 'when I did a new ascent, never expected that anyone would repeat it.'

Early among these remarkable climbs was that on the Taschhorn, an enterprise in which he was joined by V. J. E. Ryan, an Irishman whose climbing enthusiasm flared up during the first years of the century and then disappeared. Both of them had surveyed their peak from the nearby Weisshorn and had decided that the great unclimbed southern face could be scaled. Their guides on this epic climb were Josef and Franz Lochmatter and Josef Knubel—Franz carrying out at the crucial point what Young afterwards declared to be the greatest mountaineering feat he had ever seen or could ever imagine.

They set out at 1.45 a.m. on 11 August 1906. When they breakfasted some six hours later they were high up on the great face and already grappling with not inconsiderable difficulties. Until they reached the top of the peak ten hours later, they passed no other spot where even two of them could stand together. For a further hour they made good progress, and at 8.30 were within 900 ft. of the summit; it was now that their troubles began. The climbing grew steadily more difficult, and eventually Franz reached a point, high above the other members of the party, from

which it seemed likely that he might not be able to advance farther, but from which it was certain he could not retreat. 'We were committed therefore to the attempt to join him, however gloomy its outlook', Geoffrey Young wrote later. 'As many as possible must be got up to him—and the rest must be left to chance.' The second guide slowly climbed up the pitch, up and out under the dome of the overhang and then grimly up to his companion above. Young and Ryan discussed what their chances were. Young estimated the odds at one in five; Ryan, who was on his honeymoon in the Alps, commented that the previous year he would not have cared much either way but that now the position was different.

There were now two men above and three below, those above clinging only to minute excrescences of the rock. Ryan now attempted to follow, but the place was such that while the rope ran down directly to him from above, the pitch could only be climbed by a route that slanted up to the right; thus, the higher he went, the more horizontal and the less helpful did the pull of the rope become. Before the pitch was finished Ryan's strength gave out and he hung, a dead weight in space held only by the two men above. Then, while one guide held, the other pulled, each using his only free hand, taking in the rope inch by hard-won inch until Ryan eventually joined the two men above.

Then it was Geoffrey Young's turn. There was no chance of the tired men above lifting his dead weight, so he pressed out against the wall with his axe. 'This

started me swinging straight out and in below the dome', he wrote later. 'After two pokes I swung in near enough to be able to give a violent, short-armed thrust against the cliff. It carried me out far enough to jump quite a number of feet of rope clear of its cling down the rock above. The guides took advantage of the easing to haul in, and I pendulum'd back a good foot higher.' So it went on until at last the curving rocks began to slope, upward still but now backward, and the worst of the pitch was over. Mercifully, and somewhat unexpectedly, they were able to extricate themselves from further difficulty.

That was perhaps to be the most desperate single situation in which Young was to find himself, but there were to be many others only slightly less hazardous. There was the day on the west face of the Grépon, for instance, when Young together with H. O. Jones, Todhunter, and the guides Josef Knubel and Henri Brocherel, succeeded in climbing the great rock-wall hanging over the Mer de Glace face and the party gathered at the foot of the final problem. The key to it consisted of a rift that ended in a short but overhanging chimney and up this chimney Knubel led, straddling the outward-sloping walls and climbing higher and higher above the group below. Finally, he was forced to a standstill and his companions below watched him trying to reach up and around the overhanging bulge and gain some hold above it. Time after time he tried, but without success.

'For a curious relief I glanced downward under my

knee,' says Young, 'where it rode through the rough red edge of the flake, and dissipated sight more comfortably down the infinity of brown depth, and away across the white concord of glaciers—a level of restfulness so remote that even its ascending murmur seemed not to belong to our present.

'A new sound from above recalled me. I looked up. Josef was in the throes of a last daring inspiration. He whipped his axe upward, balanced himself audaciously outward, and with lightning speed wedged the point of the axe-shaft into the crack above the bulge of the canopy, so that the axe-head projected horizontally and frailly into space, between our heads and the sky. Except for its sensational circumstance the next manoeuvre looked like a simple gymnasium trick. Using the wedged shaft as a horizontal bar, Josef dangled clear of the niche, and swung himself up on to it as adroitly as a Japanese juggler, until he was standing upon it—over us and nothingness. The rest of his climb looked to be a triumphal wedding-glide up a widening smile of appreciative chimney. But for minutes afterwards, while we shouted our admiration to all the echoes of the mountains, I could hear him fighting for breath, supine upon the flat summit overhead, as surely Josef never panted on a rock before.'

It is against the background of his achievement in the Alps during the first years of the twentieth century that Geoffrey Young's poems must be viewed. There are three volumes of them—*Wind and Hill* (1905), *Freedom* (1914) and *April and Rain* (1923).

In each one Young tried—and tried successfully in most cases—to do something completely new, to express in verse the feelings and exultations of mountaineering. Men had, of course, written poetry before about the Alps and about the British mountains. One of them, A. D. Godley, had even written verse that came near to the stature of poetry in some famous lines about the way in which the climber sighs

*For a vision of the Valais with the coming of July,
For the Oberland or Valais and the higher purer air,
And the true delight of living as you taste it only there!*

Young attempted something much more difficult, yet fared better. He sought to translate into terms that the ordinary man could understand the mental and physical delight that could come from grappling intimately with mountain problems. He brought the smell of the rocks into his poetry, though he did so at times with free verse which was strange to Edwardian eyes but which does not look so very abnormal to ours.

His last great pre-war climb was the west ridge of the Gspaltenhorn. A few months later Germany had invaded Belgium, and Geoffrey Young had embarked on a series of exceptional ventures of a different but quite as demanding a nature. These were of two kinds. Within a few days of the invasion of Belgium he had crossed the Channel and was on horseback in that peculiar and changeable no-man's-land that exists between an advancing and a retreating army—as a

correspondent for one of the London newspapers. His experiences during the first few weeks of war were astonishing, and he described them not only in his dispatches but in a little book, *From the Trenches (Louvain to the Aisne)*—unfortunately long out of print and available only in the Reading Room of the British Museum—which was not only brilliant war reporting but among the best things he ever wrote. His descriptions of apparently disconnected skirmishes, of the small bodies of troopers flitting with jingling harness through the lanes and villages of the Lowlands, his evocation of the sense and smell and feel of what were to be the closing episodes of one kind of warfare, are immensely readable—and curiously comparable to the exciting descriptions of the Franco-Prussian War written by that other great correspondent, Archibald Forbes, more than forty years previously.

All this was good so far as it went. Yet for men such as Young, watching the misery which the tide of war brought as it swept back and forth across a country, something more had to be done. He helped to raise funds for, to provide, and to staff, first one and then other ambulances which crossed the Channel and, in a sometimes highly irregular fashion, carried out their dangerous mission behind, at, and sometimes before, the rapidly moving front. Of the drivers, many were Quakers, or Friends, who insisted that their alternative to enlisting should be at least as dangerous as fighting; many were not Quakers but 'friends'

with a small 'f', and Young therefore suggested that the whole organization should be known as 'The Friends' Ambulance Unit', a name which has remained through two world wars and a whole series of calamities and disasters in which it has carried out its humanitarian work.

By October 1914 Young was in command of the unit. He saw it through the grim fighting in and around Ypres—an experience which produced a memorable piece of war-reporting only published in his recent book *The Grace of Forgetting*—and earned the distinction, rare for a civilian, of being mentioned in dispatches for his work in that fearful holocaust.

Then, in the pause of early 1915, it seemed that the unit's main task had been done. Italy entered the war—and, by August, Young was in command of the First British Ambulance unit for Italy. For some two years, on various parts of the Italian front, he not only supervised the whole work of the unit but constantly took the vehicles wherever they were most needed. It is a measure of his work that during this period he twice won, among other decorations, the Italian medal For Valour, the Italian equivalent of a British D.S.O. and bar.

In the August of 1917 the Allies opened an assault upon the enemy positions dug into the rocky massif of Monte San Gabriele, and throughout the opening stages of the attack Young took volunteer vehicles up across the exposed face of the mountain, along a road blasted with shellfire, to within a few hundred yards

of the enemy lines; only from this point could he help to get the wounded down to less exposed positions.

Reinforcements, ammunition, ambulances, all had to be funnelled up the single narrow road, and one night it appeared that this had at last been made impassable by shellfire. But there was some doubt about it, and it was suggested that Young's fast Mercedes ambulance might be able to show that the way was in fact still clear. Thus the heavy traffic might be got moving once again. He went on ahead with his Irish driver. Higher up, they were at last brought to a standstill, the barrage of fire creeping down the road in a flurry of shell-bursts. Young got out to prospect the position.

'Rockets green, white and red were vomiting out of the lower shadows and shattering far up among the stars; and orange flares and flame-bursts crackled and flickered over and all round the dim blue hill contours. The assault on the San Gabriele summit must be due. I looked up along the mountain-side above my road, a sickly green under the moon. The short rough slopes ended not far above, against the blunt skyline of the mountain top. I could see the faint rim of the summit plateau running across the night. But now, every second, it was blackening into definite outline, an inky cone upon higher blue darkness, as bursts of dazzling blue star-shells and a wide ring of fire rushed up round it from the enveloping trenches of our attack. All the night was filled with noise, and with the thundering echoes from the mountain-side and the

river gorge. The firing above me grew so close that it seemed pouring lava-like down the mountain at me, as I walked almost towards it, and full in view, under the malice of the moon.

'Then, the world crashed, far too suddenly for sound. A blacksmith's hammer thudded on my left thigh, so savagely that other strokes on head and side were only numb.'

Some time later he learned how the doctors, in spite of all efforts, had been unable to save one leg, which was amputated above the knee.

Here, it would have seemed to most men, was the end of the dream; it shows something of the measure of Geoffrey Young that he refused to look at the matter in quite that way. 'It was certain', he wrote later, 'that I should return to mountains. They were my best friends; and even when I was knocked out they had remained so. I ought to have been dead in five minutes, said the operating surgeons, with great vein and artery both severed, had not muscle made silk by climbing whipped in round and closed them.'

It was a long road back, followed for six years with continuous effort and experiment, and before the end of it was reached there was published what may well be regarded as Young's most substantial contribution to mountaineering—*Mountain Craft*. The book had been completed shortly before the outbreak of war, and after much rewriting it finally appeared in 1920; it is an indication of its fundamental value that today, more than a third of a century later, after there

have taken place some of the greatest revolutions in climbing technique that the sport has known, it is still by far the best book of its kind that has been written.

Mountain Craft was unique in a number of ways. There had been 'textbooks' before which dealt with what might be called the purely mechanical problems of mountaineering—the Badminton 'Mountaineering' volume in 1892, the first summary of what was known about the sport and its practice in various parts of the world, and Claude Wilson's *Mountaineering* which appeared the following year. *Mountain Craft* was different in that it analysed the fundamental principles underlying the practice of climbing. 'Some men are born climbers', Young wrote in his Preface. 'They will learn little about climbing from precepts. At the same time many of the finest climbers fall short of our ideal of safe method because they have never concerned themselves with the possible existence of any fundamental principles governing the various unrelated movements in which they delight; and so it comes that, though they may do nine things, by instinct, right, they do the tenth, by habit, wrong. For these climbers I am not without hope that the statement, made I believe here for the first time, of the principles which underlie all correct climbing motions, and which have been steadily emerging through fifty years of practical mountaineering, may not be entirely useless. If they find that nine spokes of their practice lead back to my hub, and the tenth does not, they may

learn how to correct the tenth. If, on the contrary, they find that only one leads back to it, and nine radiate elsewhither, well then, no doubt they will decide that I am wrong.'

Young devoted chapters to equipment and reconnoitring, which had to a certain extent been dealt with elsewhere, but he also wrote at length on management and leadership, on guided and guideless mountaineering, on rock-climbing, climbing in combination, and corrective method, the last seeking 'to prevent mistakes from developing into disasters'. *Mountain Craft* was a unique book, yet it was hardly more remarkable than the exploits of its author during the years following its publication.

'We may trust', he wrote later, 'that there will never be many one-legged climbers.' For most men the extraordinary thing was that there should be one at all. Yet for Geoffrey Young there were at least two reasons why a return to the hills had to be made. The first was that his injury was a personal challenge that had to be met; it was part of the nature of the man that one did not succumb, submit, allow oneself to be beaten by circumstance. The second is more difficult to understand fully today, in an age where science has relieved at least some of the suffering that goes with the loss of a leg or an arm. After the First World War the limbless were not only more helpless, more circumscribed, than they are today; they were also tragically more numerous. And, Young felt, it would be of some encouragement to those thousands

if it could be shown that a one-legged man *need* not be so helpless as tradition then demanded.

He set about the business in a typically thorough fashion, using the years of recuperation to work out the principles of leg movement, and then scouring the limb-makers of Europe for some fitment that would give him back as much as possible of his pre-war agility. Finally, when all else seemed useless, he himself designed 'the peg', a device which enabled him to walk with less difficulty than before.

He then began to case himself back to the old ways. First short walks, then longer and rougher walks. There must have been a thousand times when the difficulties seemed insurmountable, when all those who said that the thing was impossible must have seemed right, and when it would have been so easy to give up the struggle. Instead, Young persevered.

In 1918 he married the daughter of his old mountaineering friend, Cecil Slingsby, the pioneer of climbing in Norway. He recommenced his Pen-y-Pass parties. He lived at Cambridge and year by year gathered round himself in Wales the mountain enthusiasts that the University produced.

Then he began to climb again. On Tryfaen, the mountain he had known so well a third of a century earlier, he climbed the Gashed Crag, a route of character where 'after the long months of foot-drag and zig-zag up hill-side, it came as a lightening of the spirit to be able to swing lightly upward on arms and hands, and feel again in balance'.

This was only the beginning. There were climbs in the Lakes, and on one historic day he and Cecil Slingsby were led up the North Ridge of the Pillar by Raymond Bicknell, Slingsby celebrating his seventieth birthday on this occasion. Back in Wales, he reclinced the Roof Route on Lliwedd that he had discovered so long ago, finding the crucial slab difficult—where, of course, the vast untrained but two-legged mass of mankind would have found it impossible.

And, in 1927, he went back to the Alps.

First there was the problem of finding those with whom to climb. Young felt that they had to be old friends who would bear with the slower pace—though there can have been few mountaineers of his own stature who would not have sprung at the chance of climbing with him. There were friends enough, the incomparable Franz Lochmatter, and many others who had been touched and influenced, and whose lives had been made different by his beliefs, and who were waiting eager to help him.

His first climb under the new conditions was the little peak of the Riffelhorn, with Franz standing below and nearby, ready to correct any misjudgement but not bringing a rope with him. It must have been a great day in Young's life. All went well. 'It was the one Alpine climb upon which Franz Lochmatter and I were fated to be alone together', Young wrote. 'With no man have I ever been in closer sympathy, not only in mountaineering, but in our outlook upon life.'

This was the beginning. The thing was possible.

Great exertion—by comparison with the old days—was now necessary, and there were innumerable problems of balance, of the varied texture of rock, snow, grass and ice to be solved. Yet it was possible to climb once more, and for almost the next decade Young did so.

He went up Monte Rosa. He went up the Matterhorn. And in 1929 he carried out a whole series of excursions from the Montenvers that included the ascent of the Requin and of the Grépon. On the Grépon, in particular, all went well, and there was a surging back of that old confidence and delight.

'It was well worth the long years of denial', Young later wrote. 'I could have wished the acrobatics twice as long, and never have grudged the fatigue. Until the final chimney there had been nothing in these hazards technically too difficult for me, and the hours of sunshine and exercise had been bringing back something of the readiness and much of the rhythm of the balanced movement. Mountaineers will not need to be told of the almost sensuous delight in regaining confident touch, in movement over rock of this soundheartedness, upon heights of this magnificence. As I held on to it firmly for its security, I felt at the same time, with the violin fingertips that come in Aiguille climbing, that I was caressing the sun-warm surface from old affection for its good harsh holds and comfortable friction.'

Other peaks followed, in Wales, in the Lakes, and in the Alps, many of these last-named with Josef

Knubel, until finally there came an ascent of the Rothhorn, a fall, a miraculous escape, a decision that there must be no more major ascents of this sort.

By this time, Geoffrey Young's influence had spread far beyond the Alpine world which had marvelled at his heroic achievements. He lived and breathed mountains, and wherever he went men understood, perhaps for the first time, the power that they might have in shaping men's lives.

In 1940 he became President of the Alpine Club and, as such, set in motion the machinery which was to produce an organization for whose setting-up he had campaigned more than once in his long mountain career. Soon after the turn of the century, after the end of the First World War, and again during the 1930's, Young had suggested that one single body should speak for all the various mountaineering and climbing clubs in Britain. Each club, of course, had its own background, its own interests, traditions and regional problems, and it was vital that these should be retained. Yet when it came to any question dealing with the whole country, no one body could speak for mountaineers as a whole.

While the last war was still continuing, Young saw that this problem would be even more pressing with the coming of peace. And, as a result first of his initiative and then of his guidance, there finally came into existence the British Mountaineering Council, an organization on which most of the major British climbing clubs were represented, a body which has

already weathered twelve years of sometimes uncertain growth.

The B.M.C., attempting to speak for a multitude of divers mountaineering groups, is of necessity a largely impersonal body, basically concerned with facts rather than with ideas. Yet it is also an expression of belief and in that sense is a triumph for the causes, the views and the ideals to which Young has devoted his life.

Now in his eightieth year, white-haired and benign, as upright and as smiling as when he helped to create history in the Alps half a century ago, Young is Britain's 'Grand Old Man' of mountaineering, one of those rare mortals who manages to become a legend in his own lifetime.

VI

BRIGADIER SIR JOHN HUNT

THERE are no written rules of mountaineering. But there are conventions and beliefs, and many of these change from generation to generation, so that climbers of one age look at mountain problems and their possible solutions with eyes slightly different from those of their predecessors. The reason why the majority of men at any one time climb mountains at all therefore changes with the passage of time: these changes are not clear-cut or sudden but are, rather, of emphasis, taking place over long periods, and many of them are subject to endless argument. Yet few climbers would deny that during the last half-century there has been a movement away from the metaphysical approach of Mallory, with his belief that 'something sublime is the essence of mountaineering'. More men than in Mallory's day now climb purely for the physical gusto of the sport. There is more emphasis on the stern, almost military, planning of operations and less on the joys of personal discovery.

As the epitome of the modern approach there is sometimes cited Brigadier Sir H. J. C. Hunt, the John Hunt who planned the successful ascent of Everest in

1953. This is a superficial and misleading view, held largely on account of the publicity which followed Hunt's approach to the problem of climbing Everest. Here, it is apt to be claimed, is the typically modern mountaineer who regards the sport as a series of military operations, a successful ascent as victory, and anything less as defeat; the man who looks on mountains solely as an exercise-ground for the human body. That this is not at all the case is shown by quoting from a speech that John Hunt made in 1953 at a dinner of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District. 'We must remember', he said, 'that man's relationship with mountains is not merely one of stern and bitter struggle. There is much more in it than rubbing our noses against vertical rock. We must not forget that mountains are not merely enemies to be conquered, but solace for the soul.'

This is, in fact, the idea that runs through the whole of his mountaineering life to an extent that would never be gathered from considering only the assault on Everest and its qualities of military efficiency. Here is a clue to his devotion to mountaineering, his belief that, put at its very lowest, the sport has a function to perform.

John Hunt was born in 1910 in India, where his father was an officer in the Indian Army, a father soon to be killed in the opening stages of the First World War. In his holidays from Marlborough, the school on the Wiltshire Downs to which he had been sent,

John Hunt was taken to the Alps by his mother, and it was in the Alps that he learned to climb. He progressed with abnormal speed and while still at school traversed Piz Palu; at the age of eighteen he passed First into Sandhurst, following his father's profession—and traversed the Meije, the rock-peak of the Dauphiné that provides one of the finest expeditions in the Alps.

He was already a mountaineer at heart—a man who enjoys being among mountains and who trains himself so that he can move among them with the maximum ease. He climbed whenever and wherever he could, both in the Alps and in Britain, devoting himself unremittingly to what most of his brother-officers probably thought was a rather ascetic sport. He passed out of Sandhurst as he had passed in—first—won the King's Medal and the Anson Memorial Sword, and was then commissioned in the King's Royal Rifle Corps.

So far, in spite of his unusual ability, his record was not so very different from that of scores of other young men who went climbing. In 1935, however, came the chance to carry out one of his ambitions—to explore virtually unknown mountain country. He was then a young lieutenant, serving with his regiment in India, and he decided to spend his leave with a brother officer, James Waller, and two R.A.F. officers, in exploring the country around Peak 36, a 25,400-ft. summit in the Saltoro range of the Karakoram in the far north-west of India.

Little was known about the area, let alone about the peak, and most of the information that Hunt and his party were able to glean came from Dr. Longstaff, the veteran Himalayan explorer, and the book *Two Summers in the Ice-World of the Karakoram*, written twenty years previously by Mr. and Mrs. Bullock-Workman, two stalwart and indefatigable mountain-travellers who had visited the country earlier in the century.

Once in the area of Peak 36, Hunt and his companions had to carry out a detailed reconnaissance to discover which was the best side from which to approach it. They were limited by the needs of economy, for this was an expedition of four young officers, travelling on their own resources and unsubsidized by any of the organizations that were later to make Himalayan travel slightly less difficult. They were also hampered by the weather which gave them heavy snow and blizzards and then, after a short break, a three-day storm that nearly wrecked the expedition's chances of success.

One route up the mountain was attempted, and then abandoned when it was found to be too dangerous for porters. A fresh route was tried and, when it seemed that all was set for a determined attack, bad weather intervened once again and a blizzard pinned the members of the party in their tents for more than two days. By this time, the effect of living for such a time at high altitudes—they spent in all thirty days above 18,000 ft.—was beginning to be felt; food supplies were

becoming low, and it was obvious that the first break in the weather would have to be utilized if any chances of reaching the summit were to remain.

Finally, the weather *did* improve, the party—minus one of its number who had fallen sick—moved up to their highest camp, and after a night when there was about fifty degrees of frost, set out on the final lap to the summit. They had high hopes of success, for the most difficult parts of the east face of the mountain which they were climbing had already been passed; only relatively easy slopes lay above them. They were setting out, they believed, from a camp about 23,800 ft. up, and therefore had only between 1,600 and 2,000 ft. to go. Only later did they learn that there had been an error in estimating the height of each successive camp that had been set up, and that they had been some 1,000 ft. or more lower than was believed.

The weather was fine and each of the three men took turns at leading. 'Except for two troublesome crevasses, no technical difficulties were encountered, but the height made itself felt', Hunt wrote later. 'We were individually taking from four to six breaths for each step for the greater part of this day. As we eventually approached the crest of the south-east ridge, the truth regarding our height gradually dawned on us. It was nearly one o'clock; if the summit was not close, we could not reach it in the time available. Moreover, a sudden change had occurred in the weather. Great brown mists were being blown

vertically up over the ridge from the south, and were pouring over "Peak 36 col" into the basin of "Peak 36 glacier". Snow was being driven about everywhere, and the fine view was rapidly blotted out. At last on the ridge, we saw the summit and prominent gendarme, still about half a mile away along the ridge, though not considerably above us. The game was up. Progressing as we were at about 300 ft. an hour, we could not hope to reach the summit, and the weather decided the issue.'

They were forced to retreat, and it was as well that they did so, for they had barely reached the lower slopes of the mountain when the worst storm that they had experienced broke over Peak 36—a storm bad enough, there is little doubt, to have marooned them had they still been on the higher ridges.

Although the party had failed to reach their summit, the best approach to the mountain had been discovered and the task of those who would doubtless come afterwards had been made infinitely easier. Moreover, the exertions on Peak 36 had brought Hunt and his party into first-class condition—a fact underlined by the exploit of two of them a fortnight later. This was the ascent of the south face of Kolahoi, a 17,799-ft. rock-peak, by Hunt and Rowland Brotherhood of the R.A.F.

One route up Kolahoi had been made in 1912; Hunt and Brotherhood made another—in a single fifteen-hour day during which they reached their peak from a camp five miles away, climbed 7,500 ft., much of it up

difficult, and all of it up unknown, rock, and then returned to camp.

Hunt was steadily becoming one of the most experienced all-round mountaineers with Himalayan experience, and it was natural that he should attempt to join the Everest expedition which was planned for 1936. What is more unexpected is the fact that—together with H. W. Tilman and N. E. Odell—he should be rejected on medical grounds by the doctors, a fact which he wryly remembered when choosing the candidates for Everest sixteen years later.

During those sixteen years, at the start of which he was aged twenty-six, Hunt confirmed his position as a first-class mountaineer. His achievements were considerable, not only because he was lucky in the opportunities which Service life gave him, but because he seized such opportunities with enthusiasm. He climbed not only in Britain and in the Alps, but from the most unlikely of bases—Greece, the Suez Canal Zone, and Paris.

In 1937 he reconnoitred Kangchenjunga—with his recently married wife who shared his enthusiasm for mountaineering, and who was to develop into a first-class climber. Together with C. R. Cooke, they spent some weeks on and around the Zemu Glacier testing the possibility of high climbing after the monsoon and had hopes of being able to make an attempt on Kangchenjunga itself.

Weather conditions prevented this, but much new ground was covered and first crossings were made of

a number of high passes. Hunt and his wife made two attempts on the Sugarloaf, a high peak rising to the north-west of the Zemu Glacier, and reached some 21,000 ft. on each occasion, only some 400 ft. from the top.

Hunt and Cooke both climbed the 19,000-ft. Keilberg, while Hunt alone reached the 23,560-ft. south-western summit of Nepal Peak. Much new ground was covered and the expedition was the first which revealed Hunt's exceptional powers of leadership.

His next major effort was an attempt, in 1939, on 21,953-ft. Pandim. It was stopped by the outbreak of war, and Major Hunt, as he then was, soon found himself in Britain, attached to the Motor Battalions of the King's Royal Rifle Corps.

His first chance of instilling into the troops some of his own enthusiasm for mountains and mountaineering came in 1942 when he was put in charge of a toughening course held for an Armoured unit at Helyg, the Climbers' Club hut in North Wales.

The officers and men who attended it were normally concerned with tanks and carriers. At Helyg they were toughened by a fortnight's course of ridge-walking, climbing and fell-racing that took them up most of the peaks of Snowdonia. As instructors, Hunt had such men as A. W. Bridge, a well-known pre-war climber—one who had, incidentally, perfected the art of falling, so that he could drop twenty-five or more feet without injury; C. W. F. Noyce, one of the leading rock-climbers of the 1930's; and C. F. Holland, a

veteran who had taken part in the near-legendary explorations of Scafell Central Buttress in the Lakes before the First World War. With the help of such men, Hunt was able to carry out the toughening-up requirements that the Army had laid down, and to imbue many of the men with his own enthusiasm for anything and everything to do with mountains.

An even better opportunity to do the same thing came later in the year when he was appointed Chief Instructor at the Mountain Warfare and Winter Warfare School at Braemar in the Cairngorms. The school was formed by Frank Smythe with the aim of giving specialized training in mountain- and winter-warfare, and for six months Hunt and his companions took a succession of Commandos—more than one of whom claimed to have seen Collie's 'Grey Man'—up and down and across the hills.

This pleasant work lasted all too short a while. After a few months of it, Major Hunt rejoined his regiment, and subsequently served through the North African and Italian campaigns, winning the D.S.O. in Italy. Then, as commander of the 11th Indian Brigade, he was awarded the C.B.E. for helping to put down the Communist rebellion in Greece, and it was in this country that he saw the end of the war.

For the following seven years Colonel Hunt, as he had become by this time, suffered the fate of most Army officers of the period—a succession of postings which took him to most parts of Europe and to more than one part of Africa. But, wherever he went, he

still managed to climb; not only on his longer leaves, during which he went back to the Alps and climbed many of the classic routes, but also during shorter spells. For he proved that wherever a man may be, he can, if he is determined enough, almost always find something to climb.

In the summer of 1945 he organized Mountain Training courses for his Indian and Scottish troops on the slopes of Mount Olympus, basing the courses on those of the old Braemar centre. And, writing of the experience afterwards, he showed in a sentence, significant in view of his later work, just how he regarded such courses. 'I am, in fact, a convinced advocate of basic training of this type in mountain country for all Infantry, owing to the very beneficial effect it produces on morale.'

In the following winter, when the work was finished, he took part with a small group of other officers in exploring the relatively unknown mountains of Greece, the highlands of the Peloponnese, and the main Pindus Range; and, in addition, climbed Mount Athos, that Holy Mountain with its steep summit of white marble that can be seen from both the slopes of Olympus and the plain of Troy.

Some two years later, based now in the Suez Canal Zone, he was able to fulfil two more ambitions—to visit and climb the Holy Mountain in Sinai and to explore the rocky pinnacles which crown the range running along the north coast of Cyprus.

The visit to Sinai came first, a journey of nearly

200 miles leading south through the desert country to the east of the Gulf of Suez until Hunt and his seven companions, including his wife, turned inland towards the hilly country of the interior. Not only were the summits of the Holy Mountain climbed—one of them reputedly the summit from which Moses spoke with God during the Exodus—but a rock-climb of some 1,500 ft. or more was made on the granite buttresses of the group by Colonel Hunt and his wife, a route that reminded him of the Cairngorms.

The climbs in Cyprus followed soon afterwards, and at the end of the year a long journey south along the western side of the Gulf of Suez to Gebel Shayib, the highest summit in Egypt with the exception of the Sinai peaks.

These ventures were, in themselves, of no great mountaineering significance, yet they were good examples of the way in which Hunt would succeed in getting to *some* mountain wherever he happened to be stationed.

Soon after 1948 he was posted to Paris—first to the Western Europe Commanders-in-Chief Committee and later to the headquarters staff of Allied Land Forces, Central Europe. Here he was not only within easy reach of the Alps once again: he also had at hand, in the shape of the Fontainebleau rocks, a week-end playground where all manner of rock-climbing techniques could be practised. These sandstone outcrops, not unlike magnified versions of those in the Tunbridge Wells area of the Kent-Sussex border, rise in

strange groups for some sixty feet or more from among the clearings in the Forest of Fontainebleau, and Colonel Hunt was introduced to them by his old friend Bernard Pierre, the French mountaineer, and a number of other members of the Groupe de Haute Montagne. They provided fairly constant practice until, after a couple of years, he was posted once again—this time to Germany.

It was here, in October 1952, while serving on the Staff of I Corps, that he received the invitation which was to alter the course of his life so radically. It came from the Himalayan Committee, as the Mount Everest Committee of the Alpine Club and the Royal Geographical Society has become, and it asked whether he would be willing to lead the expedition to Everest that was about to be planned. Matters had been arranged in advance with the Army authorities, and Hunt at once travelled to London for his first meeting with the Committee.

Before dealing with the events that that meeting produced, it is necessary to describe briefly the various attempts that had been made to climb Everest since Mallory and Irvine had last been seen moving upwards into the mists on that day in 1924.

No climber set foot on Everest for more than eight years after that tragedy, largely because the Tibetans refused to allow further expeditions into their country. In 1933 their attitude changed, and another Everest venture, led this time by Hugh Ruttledge, an Indian Civil Servant, set out from England for the

Rongbuk Glacier. The party followed the same route as the members of the 1924 expedition, established camps below, then above, the North Col, and finally succeeded in setting up a series of higher camps, from the last of which, Camp VI, it was felt that the final pyramid of the mountain could be tackled with some chance of success. Two parties did, in fact, get to within about 1,000 ft. of the summit; but the problems set by the altitude, which sapped their energy and made the slightest movement arduous, and by the rocks of the summit pyramid, now found to be more difficult than had been expected, combined to frustrate all their hopes.

Two years later a reconnaissance set out for the mountain under Eric Shipton, one of the most experienced climbers then living, and one of the men who had gone high on the mountain in 1933. The Shipton reconnaissance was a lightweight affair which cost only some £1,500 compared with the £10,000 of the bigger expeditions. Bad snow conditions prevented an attempt on the summit itself, but much useful information was gained about conditions high on the mountain—and the members of the expedition also succeeded in climbing no fewer than twenty-six peaks more than 20,000 ft. high.

The Shipton reconnaissance was followed in 1936 by a major expedition led by Hugh Ruttledge, but once again weather proved to be the decisive factor; on this occasion the monsoon broke six weeks earlier than usual and prevented the expedition from getting

firmly on to the summit slopes above the North Col. Before the war broke out, one more attempt on Everest was made, by a lightweight party led by H. W. Tilman in 1938; for the third time in succession unexpectedly bad weather ruined all chances of success.

There followed the interval of the war years, and it was only in 1951 that the next British expedition, led by Shipton, set out for Everest. This party, instead of approaching the mountain from the north, across the great high upland of Tibet, marched up from the south, through the green valleys of the state of Nepal. There were two reasons for thus abandoning the route which had always previously been followed. One was that Nepal was now open to British mountaineers for the first time, and they naturally wished to get a closer view of the great southern slopes of Everest. The second was that since 1921, when Mallory and Bullock had looked across to a great glacier-filled hollow on the south-western side of the mountain, climbers had wondered what really lay to the south of Everest. Mallory had considered that an advance up through the hollow was impracticable, but explorations by H. W. Tilman in 1950 suggested that this might not be so. The south ridge of Everest, sloping down to what was called the South Col, appeared to provide a practicable route, while thousands of feet below the col lay the great hollow, named the West Cwm by Mallory. Two main question marks remained: Would it be possible to gain

access to the West Cwm; and, once gained, would it be possible to force a way up the steep slopes that led from the floor of the cwm to the South Col? It was to these questions that Shipton's party sought the answers in 1951. His expedition, strengthened by the addition of two young New Zealanders, H. E. Riddiford and Edmund Hillary, solved both problems; its members found that a difficult but practicable way could be made up a steep ice-fall into the West Cwm itself; and from the floor of this huge amphitheatre it was possible to work out a route up the steep slopes that led to the South Col. Shipton's expedition, which had only been planned as a reconnaissance, had insufficient supplies for an attempt on Everest itself, and its members therefore returned to Britain intending to come back the following year—only to learn that Swiss mountaineers had received permission from the Nepalese to make an attempt on Everest in 1952. At first it was felt that a combined Anglo-Swiss expedition might be possible, but plans for this fell through, and it was decided that if the Swiss failed in 1952 the British would make a major attempt in 1953.

As it turned out, the Swiss made two attempts, one in the spring of 1952, during which two members of the expedition successfully reached the South Col and pressed up the south ridge to within less than 1,500 ft. of the summit, and a second attempt in the autumn.

This second Swiss effort to reach the summit was actually in progress when Colonel Hunt came to

England, and it was tacitly agreed that should the Swiss succeed the British attempt would be cancelled.

The Swiss failed, having been held at the South Col by the appalling weather which raged there and which virtually confined them to their tents. Colonel Hunt went ahead with his plans.

One of his first actions after meeting the Himalayan Committee was to ask its members for precise instructions. He realized, with what turned out to have been surprising intuition, that this expedition would be watched by people all over the world with even more interest than had the earlier expeditions, and he wished to be clear in his own mind just *what* he was to be responsible for. A team had to be selected; stores and equipment had to be chosen and ordered; the entry of a relatively large party into Nepal had to be negotiated carefully, for the members of the party would, in a certain though undefined way, be virtually representatives of Great Britain; and there was little doubt that either success or failure would attract extensive publicity. Hunt wanted to know just where the division of responsibility lay between himself and the Committee, and he obtained from its members a directive laying this down.

This first action was typical of the efficient spirit in which the whole expedition was conducted. There was in some quarters a certain undercurrent of regret that it should thus be organized 'as a military operation', in the phrase that was generally used. Yet Hunt had rightly appreciated that by 1953 the ascent

of Everest could no longer, for better or for worse, be regarded as an ordinary carefree climbing venture. He, least of all men, liked either the aura of national competition that had grown up round the enterprise, or the sometimes sensational publicity that accompanied it. Nevertheless, these things existed. The ascent of Everest was no longer a sporting adventure but a job to be done. There was therefore everything to be said for doing it as efficiently as possible, and it was in this mood that Hunt set about the business.

It was here that his long training as a Staff Officer began to bear fruit. It is difficult to give briefly and accurately the duties of a Staff Officer in the British Army, but they may well be described as those of having under command all the facts necessary to deal with any particular sets of circumstances, and of preparing plans for their use. The man who in 1953 had the best chance of directing members of a team to the summit of Everest had to have just that training, in addition to the love of mountains and mountaineering without which he would be unable to keep the confidence and enthusiasm of his party. Once this is appreciated it is seen that Colonel Hunt was, perhaps, the only man fitted to carry out this particular task at this particular time.

His first job was to choose a team. There was no shortage of candidates, for more than a year previously British mountaineering clubs had been asked to draw up lists of 'possibles'; in addition to the large numbers of names put forward, scores of young men

naturally wrote asking for places on the expedition as soon as it became known that the party was being chosen. Within three weeks Hunt had prepared 'short lists', interviewed scores of candidates, and had finally submitted his list to the Himalayan Committee.

A few days later he presented his 'Memorandum, Everest, 1953', a document that is probably unique in the history of mountaineering. The document consisted of three Planning Papers which dealt with the approach to the mountain and the period of acclimatization before operations started on Everest itself, the ascent, and the expedition's time-table. Each of the first two papers gave an appreciation of the problems involved and then the detailed solutions of these. The ascent of Everest itself was to be divided into a build-up and an assault phase, and by studying the Hunt memorandum it was possible to discover how many tents would be at which camps on any particular day; how many porters would be carrying what, and where to; and where any of the various planned assault parties would be on any day of the operation. The plan for the assault itself was purely a tentative one, and events on the mountain eventually called for its amendment in a number of minor ways; yet there is no doubt that although Everest might have been climbed without this unique memorandum, it would not have been climbed with such efficiency and with such an absence of fuss.

The full story of that great expedition has been told a score of times during the last three years; the details

of the steady build-up of supplies in the West Cwm, the forcing of a route up and across the Lhotse Face to the South Col, the first assault by Evans and Bourdillon which reached the lower, south, summit of the mountain, and then the successful assault by Hillary and Tenzing—all these are well known. And, to a certain extent, they have tended to overshadow the part played by Hunt himself.

From the time the expedition left Katmandu early in March 1953 until the assault by Hillary and Tenzing started at the end of May, Hunt had the 24-hour-a-day responsibility of adapting the general plan of assault in the many minor ways that were necessary. He had to take the decisions—and, in addition, play his part in carrying out the multitude of tasks that fall to the leaders of such expeditions. He helped to test the two different kinds of oxygen apparatus that were carried. He had to ensure that the route worked out up the ice-fall was really suitable for Sherpa porters. When it came to carrying out the reconnaissance of the huge Lhotse face—one of the phases on which the whole success of the expedition depended—Hunt himself went up with Charles Evans and Tom Bourdillon to start off the operation. Later, when that problem had been solved and a camp successfully set up on the South Col, he went up with the first assault party and, two days later, carried a 45-lb. load up the south-east ridge to a height of 27,350 ft., thus ensuring that Bourdillon and Evans had the best possible send-off

Earlier, when he was working out just how the assault would be made, he had, reluctantly, to omit his own name from those who stood the best chance of reaching the summit. 'It was tempting to go for the top myself', he wrote later. 'But I'm sure I've chosen the best men for the job and that my position enables me to control the business and make decisions on the spot.'

The success of the Everest party was a success not only for mountaineering virtuosity—forcing a way up through the ice-fall and pioneering a route across the Lhotse face were both major operations—but also for what the Americans call logistics, for the careful planning at which Hunt was so expert. This is best realized when it is appreciated that the assault could only be made from the camp on the South Col, a camp at the end of a long supply-line running back to the Base Camp. Yet of the total climbing party of eleven, no fewer than nine reached the col, two of them twice, while nineteen of the Sherpas carried 30-40 lb. loads there, six of them twice. Thus it was that although each of the two assault parties had to delay twenty-four hours on the col due to bad weather, supplies of oxygen, food and fuel were all sufficient for the job in hand—a fact that does not sound dramatic but is a measure of the efficient way in which the expedition was run.

What did the ascent of Everest mean to Sir John Hunt? First, it meant, of course, that he was transformed overnight from a virtually unknown figure

into a national hero and an international figure. One result was that on his return to Britain he was set off on a long course of lecture tours describing the expedition. *The Ascent of Everest*, his official account of the expedition, was finished in record time and immediately became the best-selling of all mountaineering books. Sir John, as he soon was, broadcast, lectured—and found himself, with the other members of the expedition, the centre of a publicity that was not always too welcome. They seemed, he wryly said later, to have become a curious mixture somewhere between variety artistes and Royalty!

Yet all this was only the superficial and passing phase of an excitement that eventually died down. Two things were more important, and it is these which Sir John has stressed on scores of occasions since his return to Britain. One was the setting up of the Mount Everest Foundation, a fund built up from the proceeds of the books, lectures, and films of the expedition, and used to support exploration in mountain areas.

More important still was the 'lift' that the success of the expedition gave to men and women all over the world. The publicity that came with success was not always ideal, but it did, at least, create an interest in mountaineering greater than had ever before been known. To Sir John it seemed that that must be one of the most important results of the enterprise.

'We climb because we like it,' he wrote, 'and to most of us that is sufficient reason for going to the

high hills. But I believe that there is behind this urge a deeper and more far-reaching message implicit in the hardships and the dangers to which mountaineering exposes its followers and the close comradeship which it helps to create. It is this last quality, transcending all barriers of race, creed, and language, which is the true and lasting message of our venture.'

This, it might well be claimed, is also the message of, and driving force behind, much mountaineering, the force, recognized or unrecognized, which since the earliest days of the sport has driven men up to the mountains. It may be that Mallory, after all, said the final words, and that 'something sublime is the essence of mountaineering'.

